“What Does It Mean for a Wife to Submit?”

Do you have information on what it means for a woman to submit—is obedience in some sense a part of it? When might she come out from under his “lead”?

I’m doing a bible study and the issue came up last week. In my home I basically submit to my wife because her judgement has been proven to be better in most things and I have a very flexible temperament. Am I a wimp??? Sometimes I wonder if we are doing it right.

Dear _____,

Biblical submission is a military term meaning “to arrange oneself under,” the way a soldier places himself under the authority and leadership of his commander. God’s plan is for male leadership and authority in the marriage relationship, the home and the church. . . and for men to lead, it’s important for women to follow them. It does NOT mean being a doormat or denying one’s gifts, talents and passions; it means using those very things to help her husband be the best he can be and to help their family and home be and run most effectively.

Submission does involve obedience, as we all obey God, the governmental authorities and the elders in our churches as we submit to them; however, the submission of a wife to her husband has a different flavor because of our one-flesh intimacy. Obedience is a function of a power differential, seen best in the parent-child and government-citizen relationships. If the husband-wife relationship is characterized by the husband giving commands and the wife obeying, that kind of power inequity will destroy intimacy. Nonetheless, wifely submission does involve cooperating with

and deferring to her husband.

The only time a woman should come out from under her husband's leadership is when that would mean sinning. For instance, I know of husbands who wanted their wives to have abortions, to dance at a strip club to make money, to engage in pornography, and other immoral, unacceptable behaviors. In those cases, to submit to their husbands would have meant taking a stand against God and His standards of right and wrong, so it is wrong to submit in those admittedly (but unfortunately real) extreme situations.

I'm glad to hear you're studying the Bible to see what God says about His intent for the marriage relationship. He has ordained that husbands be what some have called "servant leaders," serving their wives by leading them as men under submission to Christ, and He has ordained that women should serve our husbands by submitting to them as we submit to Christ. This is not an effect of the Fall, because as you read Genesis 2 you can see that Adam had authority over Eve when he named her, and Eve was created for Adam to be his helper and meet his needs. (The reason we rebel against this arrangement is our own self-centeredness, exacerbated by the effect of feminism's objection to the idea of women being submissive to their husbands.)

It's wonderful that your wife has good judgment, and I humbly suggest that you see this as an asset to your marriage. But having good judgment and being right don't have anything to do with who submits to who. If you have been gifted with a wise wife, then it is your responsibility to seek out her input and perspective before making a decision of what to do. There is a big difference between listening to your wife and saying, "That sounds really good. Let's do that," and saying "Yes dear, whatever you say dear, you just tell me what to do and I'll do it."

Are you a wimp? I don't know and sure wouldn't want to call

you any names! <smile> Are you passively allowing your wife to dictate how things should be done in your home, instead of discussing things as equal partners? May I strongly suggest you read Stu Weber's extraordinary book *Tender Warrior*, which Ray and I believe is the best book out there for men. In fact, the cover of the book is appropriately intriguing: "every man's purpose, every woman's dream, every child's hope."

I hope this helps, and I send this along with a prayer that you and your wife will find joy in God's intention for husband and wife roles and functions.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Spanish Feedback: "I Regret My Abortion, We Must Fight It"

Translated Spanish Q & A:

Dear Sirs:

I support the points you make in your article about abortion. It is true…I'm telling you this because I had one. The abortion happened when I was 21 years old and now I really regret doing this. I have 2 children that show me how beautiful it is to be a mother. When I think of what I did, I feel very sad.

We definitely have to fight against abortion. ("Definitivamente hay que luchar contra el aborto.")

Dear friend,

I am so sorry to hear of your pain over your abortion. Do you know that Jesus Christ offers you forgiveness and cleansing for your sin? He cannot take away your choice, but He can take away the guilt and the pain. The Bible tells us, If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of your sins, including abortion, and then God raised Him from the dead. He is alive today and wants to have a warm, love-filled relationship with you. For more information, please see this article on The Most Important Decision of Your Life at www.ministeriosprobe.org/docs/decision_mas_importante.html

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

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"Is God Punishing Me With Singleness?"

At times I feel tormented regarding sexual issues. I was 21 when I got saved and still a virgin. I committed at that time to be obedient to God's sexual standards. For 27 years I have prayed for marriage and family. I am now 48 and still a virgin. There have been times over the years that the God-given(?) sexual feelings were just tortuous. However, God has not answered my prayers for marriage.

Even though I know that I am within God's will, I feel tremendous shame because I feel like I'm just not

good/attractive enough to attract a husband. I look at other women who have husbands and/or children and I just feel like I am defective compared to them.

Also, it seems that plenty of people have premarital sex with impunity and that the way to get a husband is to fornicate (This is what I see demonstrated). Also, a church in my area is going to great lengths this Mother's Day to celebrate and honor single mothers. Those of us who waited and those of us who did it right and married before having children are expected to serve and bless the single mothers, most of whom are single mothers by choice. This just kind of makes me feel like my choice is silly.

I even kind of blame God for making me unattractive so that men won't want me. I just feel so much shame, torment, and low self-esteem. I feel like God might be punishing me or playing games with me.

I am so sorry. That is a very difficult burden to bear. And you are not alone! Proverbs says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (13:12), and there are a lot of heartsick people who would so love a spouse and children, but it hasnt happened.

It sounds like you may have been listening to the enemy's slanderings about God—that He is not good, and He does not really love you, and He is withholding goodies from you because He is capricious. In order to live in peace with your life as it is, may I respectfully suggest that it starts with learning to "live loved," as the author of *The Shack* puts it? I suggest that you pray every day, "Lord, show me how You love me." And be looking for the various ways in which He shows His love to you. It is essential to seek God's help in being content; otherwise, we can turn into grumpy, critical, self-pitying people that others dont want to be around. An "attitude of gratitude" goes a long way in embracing life as it is instead of focusing on what we DONT have. Thats why I

strongly encourage people to keep a gratitude journal, recording three things every day for which we can thank the Lord.

I do understand shame, and lived with a "shame disability" for many years before God set me free from it when I accepted His gift of His acceptance, as well as the gift of self-acceptance. I pray you will receive this gift as well, learning to embrace His love for you and see the many ways in which He communicates His love and delight in you, every day.

Sue Bohlin

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"Can Cheaters Remarry Without Living in Adultery?"

I want to know is oral sex adultery? My friend's husband cheated on her. She divorced him, but before she divorced him, she had sex with another man. She is now divorced and wants to marry the man she later cheated with. Is this ok? Or since they both cheated, can they remarry without living in a continual state of adultery?

First question: Yes, oral sex is adultery. Oral sex is sex. Having sex with a person when youre married to someone else is adultery. So oral sex is adultery. (Here's a question that moves this question from the hypothetical to the real world: Ask anyone who's married how they would feel about their spouse having oral sex with a third party, and if it constitutes cheating. Most people [those without seared consciences, at least!] would quickly assure you they wouldn't

want their spouse even *kissing* another person, much less getting far more intimate than that!)

Second question: Its not so much the living in a continual state of adultery, but the permanent stain of having been adulterers that can never go away. Both people would be marrying people who have demonstrated that they are cheaters. Second marriages have an extremely high failure rate, but it's even higher for those that begin in adultery.

What a sad question. It makes my heart hurt. But Im glad you asked.

Sue Bohlin

"Is My Husband's Cybersex Grounds For Divorce?"

My husband has been having cyber sex. Sometimes there was a camera on the other end. Is this biblical grounds for divorce?

Dear _____,

I am so sorry. What a horrible betrayal you are feeling!

I don't know God's definitive answer on this, but I do think that cyber sex and webcams are high-tech ways of extending the sins of lust and fantasy, which are mental and emotional sins . . . but I don't believe they cross the line of adultery. Actual sex between two people has an effect of creating soul-ties to each other that compromises the marriage covenant.

I think the bigger issue is one of hard-heartedness. If you have asked your husband not to engage in cyber sex and to get

rid of the camera, and he refuses because he wants what he wants even if it means hurting you, then that's the real issue. What kind of marriage is it if one person makes self-centered choices that insure the other will be hurt?

May I respectfully suggest you read Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud's excellent book *Boundaries in Marriage* for some wisdom on what to do next. For example, I have a friend whose husband refuses to stop going to a website where he can play games and chat with other women, and he has fallen into at least emotional affairs with a couple of them. She has said, "As long as you won't get rid of Pogo, you can do your own laundry." This way, his stubbornness and selfishness are costing him something.

Hope you find this helpful. Again, I am so sorry. My heart hurts for you.

Sue Bohlin

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"My Kids Are Into Goth, Punk and Emo Sub-Cultures"

My two teenage daughters are interested in the goth, punk and emo sub-cultures. I'm not sure how to deal with this. Could you give me some good Christian parenting advice?

I asked a couple of Christian counselors for advice about your question.

The first came back with this response:

> *The best overall reference I've seen for teens is the book Age of Opportunity by Paul David Tripp because it makes it clear the target for change is their HEART, not just behavior – otherwise we just create cooperative rebels (work the system to make life easier for "me") or religious Pharisees. There is an audio series by the same name, available from Resources for Changing Lives, 1-800-318-2186 – web site www.ccef.org.*

The second, who is a child psychologist, made these suggestions:

1. First of all, DON'T come down heavy with the hammer, telling them they are not allowed to pursue these interests. It will only backfire.

2. These lifestyles and values are meeting a need in your daughters. There is no shame in having needs; God gives us needs for others to meet, and for Himself to meet. Your job is to find out what need goth/punk/emo is meeting, and then subtly provide other, healthier ways for them to get those needs met.

3. Don't communicate that you're going to change your children and they're going to have to stop this behavior. It won't work; we don't have the power to change other people. We do, however, have the power to gain understanding about WHY they behave as they do, and then adjust our response to it.

4. Seek to understand your daughters' thinking and feeling about this. Many kids feel alienated from their parents, believing that their parents don't really care about how they think and feel (which is, unfortunately, all too true in many families). So make a plan to meet for 5-10 minutes each night, for a week, to LISTEN. Ask, "Please help me understand why goth/punk/emo is important to you. Tell me one thing that you like about it." Draw them out with unjudgmental questions; the goal is to understand, not to change them. Each night, try to

get another part of the big picture.

5. After a couple of weeks, when you have learned something about what these cultures are doing for your daughters, see if you can find other ways to get those needs met at times that interfere with activities that mean more involvement with their questionable friends. Many times, it's an esteem issue. Looking like the other people in that sub-culture makes them feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging. . . legitimate, God-given needs that are better met in the family and with friends whose values are consistent with the family's and with God's.

6. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for wisdom to be loving without being controlling. Pray that you will see what YOU need to do to make sure your daughters' emotional needs are being met. The hard thing is that adolescence is a time when, developmentally, it is normal and right for their attention to turn to friends and want to fit in with their friends more than their families. This is important for growth into independent adults. But the choice of one's friends can make or break a young person. Which is why it's essential for parents to know what's going on, with whom, and hit our knees on our children's behalf.

This is a big issue and not an easy one. I pray God's blessing on you as you seek to be wise in the face of unhealthy cultural pressures.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What is the Biblical Perspective on Childlessness?”

What is the Biblical Perspective on Childlessness?

I would suggest that God’s design and intention for most married couples is the blessing of children. So first, it starts with the foundational premise that children are a blessing from God.

The Old Testament and New Testament both indicate that there was shame connected to not being able to bear children. This is not necessarily God-given shame, but the natural outflow of knowing that usually, children are produced at some point(s) in a marriage. Shame is about sensing something is wrong about ourselves. But now that we know more about conception, we can know that sometimes things just don’t go right for a variety of reasons on a purely biological level, such as a wife whose body is allergic to her husband’s sperm, or hormone levels not conducive to maintaining a pregnancy. In that case, it’s helpful to recall the biblical concepts of:

- Stewardship of the earth, which leads to medical science. There are procedures and medications that may assist in reproduction.
- The sovereignty of God. No one can conceive unless He calls that child into being.
- Trust in the goodness of God.

With the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases that result in the infertility of one or both partners, the consequences of premarital or extramarital sexual sin may include childlessness. In this case, a biblical perspective sadly includes the principle of sowing and reaping, where infertility is the result of sinful choice.

When couples try to have children and cannot, then the biblical call to trust God means following His leading. It may mean pursuing medical treatment. Or building your family through adoption. Or choosing to live without children to free up energies for Kingdom work. (I am thinking of several couples I know who now recognize that their childlessness was the doorway to great spiritual fruitfulness of a different kind.)

A childless couple may not experience shame over their childlessness, but it would be important to give voice (and tears) to the grief, disappointment and deep sense of loss over it. David wrote in Psalm 51, "I know that You desire truth in my inmost parts," and we know that mental and spiritual health means being honest about what's going on in our hearts.

It is my privilege to share with you the deep wisdom of my friend Dr. Sandra Glahn, author of *When Empty Arms Become a Heavy Burden* and *The Infertility Companion*:

> **What the Bible says directly about infertility:**
>
> If you read the Bible cover-to-cover, you will find lots of stories about infertile couples from Abraham and Sarah to Samson's parents to Hannah and Elkanah in the Old Testament and Elisabeth and Zechariah in the New. In each of these stories the couple goes on to conceive. That's because the Bible is not a textbook on infertility. The stories are select histories included as part of a bigger story, the story of God's redemption of humankind. And infertility is often the way God uses to demonstrate His ability to do the impossible.
>
> In the Old Testament we also find promises that God will curse his people with infertility if, as a nation, they do not obey him. A problem arises when we read these sections and wrongly conclude that infertility is a curse from God.

The curses God outlined involved entire populations, including humans and livestock all infertile at once. He was not talking about individual infertility. Michal, David's wife who laughed at him for dancing before the Lord, is said to have never had children, but that does not necessarily mean she was "struck" with infertility. It may be that David just never "summoned" her again.

In one other instance in the Law we see that an adulterous woman was cursed with infertility. But overall, infertility is more an affliction of the righteous than the unrighteous. And the infertility as a curse is at a national not a personal level. In the New Testament when Elisabeth conceives, she rejoices that God has removed her shame in the eyes of the people.

How to think biblically about infertility:

Reproducing. The first commands given to humans were to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over the plant and animal kingdoms and the earth itself. The last command is to make disciples. So while reproducing physically is a wonderful part of being human, it is not the only way God has ordained and blessed for leaving a lasting legacy.

Longing. In Proverbs 30 we read that when we look around and observe the natural world as God made it, we see that it's normal for an infertile person to have deep, unfulfilled longing. Infertility can cause a lot of grief, and it is not "unspiritual" to feel a profound sense of loss.

Gifted living. The apostle Paul called celibacy a gift (1 Cor 7). And in one translation of the Psalms (NASB), children are called "a gift." (Though in the context, Psalm 127, the actual phrase is "sons are an inheritance/heritage"; at that time children were the means to economic success and many sons assured military protection). A wife is called a gift. So one way to think

biblically about infertility is to recognize that while the gift of children has been withheld, children are only one of many gifts through which God gives his blessing. If Aquilla and Priscilla ever had children, they are not mentioned.

Limits on dominion. If you read Genesis 1-2, you will notice that while God gave humans dominion, he put limits on what they were to manage/subdue. They were given stewardship if the earth and its animal and flying creatures. But notice that they were not given dominion over each other. Humans were made in the image of God, so all humanity, even at the one-cell stage, is precious to Him. One of the ways of thinking biblically about infertility is to recognize this and to tread carefully when considering advanced reproductive technologies (ARTs). There are ways to use ARTs that honor human life at the one-cell stage and there are ways that do not. We are also called to be good stewards of our bodies and our resources. That being said, infertility is only a symptom of a problem such as a malfunctioning thyroid or hormone imbalance. Many couples pursue treatment both to have a child and also to find out the source of what is wrong.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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"Did God Direct the Man to

Work for the Family and the Woman to Just Stay Home with the Kids?”

Did God really direct the man to work for the family and the woman just to stay home and take care of the kids? Please give supporting verses to your response.

The “big picture” principles are these:

1. God gave Adam the job of cultivating the garden. Work is an intrinsic part of man’s design.

> *Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. (Gen. 2:15)*

2. Eve was created to be a helpmate to Adam; nurturing relationships is an intrinsic part of woman’s design.

> *Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Gen 2:18)*

3. Men are commanded to take care of their families:

> *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8)*

4. Wives are commanded to take care of their families by caring for them:

> *Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to* ***love their husbands, to love their children,*** *to be sensible,*

> *pure, **workers at home**, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3-5)*

5. The excellent wife in Proverbs 31 (vv. 10-31) did engage in home-based businesses, but her primary focus was on her home and her family. Note that she did not "just stay home and take care of the kids"—she had a broader range of interests and activities than that—but she kept her priorities straight.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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"A Woman Has the Right to Decide What Lives or Not in Her Body"

I have been reading the "Answers to E-mails" section of your website. I agree with Sue B. I think that there is no room for small minded views in the 21st century. The church's viewpoint belongs to and was made for a different time. I am particularly concerned about your views on abortion. Do you not think a woman has the right to decide what lives or does not in her body? You make it sound like women that have abortions are cold and do not care about what they are doing. But it simply isn't like that. Is it better to bring a child into the world that isn't wanted? I am 17 and I know if I get pregnant now it would ruin my life and the baby's. I can

simply not give that baby the life it deserves and that I want for it. Is it wrong to plan a stable emotional and financial future for your child?

I'm so glad you wrote.

> *I have been reading the "Answers to E-mails" section of your website. I agree with Sue B. I think that there is no room for small minded views in the 21st century. The church's viewpoint belongs to and was made for a different time.*

I think there is an important difference between small-mindedness, and an unpopular insistence on not departing from what God has revealed to us in His word. "The church's viewpoint" is not timebound and irrelevant; it ultimately comes from God, who created reality and created us and thus has the right to make the rules and dictate the consequences of breaking those rules. One of His rules is, "Don't murder." We can't get away from the fact that abortion is taking the life of one's own child. There are deep and disturbing consequences to making that choice.

> *Do you not think a woman has the right to decide what lives or does not in her body?*

Your phraseology needs to be more accurate: it's a "who," not a "what," that lives inside a mother's body. Once a baby has been conceived, it's a whole new human being inside another. I'm sure you want to empower women to control their bodies—but if you take this position, you are only for the empowerment of ADULT women. What about unborn baby girls? They don't have any power, which is why others have to protect them.

I'm all for women controlling their own bodies. . . to prevent conception in the first place. Once a woman gets pregnant, there are two lives involved and not just hers.

> *You make it sound like women that have abortions are cold and*

> *do not care about what they are doing. but it simply isn't like that.*

I'm sorry, I don't know which article you read. A couple of us have written on abortion. My article Abortion explores the issue and facts of abortion, but the human, personal aspect is completely different. I know better than to think that women who have abortions are cold and uncaring. I know that abortion absolutely rips apart people's lives. I see for myself the aftereffects of abortion in the guilt and shame that last for years in women's lives, and it is my privilege to minister the truth to them that God wants to forgive and cleanse them of their sin.

It's one thing to talk about abortion as a way to undo a mistake. . . but it's so important to never lose sight of the fact that it's killing another human being. That is a huge, serious choice to make. (I notice you didn't mention this.)

> *Is it better to bring a child into the world that isn't wanted?*

Wanted by whom? There are far more would-be adoptive parents than there are available babies. Furthermore, no baby can be conceived without God calling them into existence; HE wants every single child! If the only one who matters is the pregnant woman, then her innocent baby is nothing more than a commodity on the level of the shoes she tried on but doesn't want to buy.

> *I am 17 and I know if I get pregnant now it would ruin my life and the baby's. I can simply not give that baby the life it deserves and that I want for it.*

I'm so glad you see what an unwise thing it would be to get pregnant! Which is why abstaining from sex is the wisest, most mature choice for a number of reasons. And this is also why,

if a baby is conceived anyway, giving him or her up for adoption—as excruciatingly painful as it is—is a way to give the baby the life s/he deserves.

> *Is it wrong to plan a stable emotional and financial future for your child*

No! It's loving, and kind, and mature. That's why it's important to wait to have a baby until one is married and able to welcome him or her into a loving family.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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"I Have Questions about the Marriage Test"

I took the Marriage Test by Kerby Anderson. A couple questions….

1) On the age question (#7), how do you score if you are between 30 and 40 years of age?

2) If this is my 2nd marriage to the SAME PERSON, how do I score question #3?

3) Again, considering this is my second marriage to the same person, how do I add up years married (#8)? We made it 7 years the first time, 5 years this time, but were pretty involved in each other's life during the 5 years we were divorced.

4) Question # 11 asks about agreeing with each other's attitudes. I think we do mostly agree, it is just usually a long, verbal battle to figure that out.

This was a very interesting test. I am anxious to see how to score those questions listed above.

Thank you for your e-mail. The marriage test we aired is based on the work of Howard Markman at the University of Denver. I assume that it will eventually be put in a book and will then answer some of the questions you are asking.

In the mean time, let me do my best to guess what the answers to your questions might be to the marriage test.

1. On the age question (#7), I assume you would receive 0 points if you are between 30 and 40 years of age. You receive a -1 if you are under 30. You receive +1 if you are over 40, and you receive +2 if you are over 60.

2. On the previous marriage question (#3), I assume you would still give yourself a -1 because you had a previous marriage even though it was to the same person.

3. On the years of marriage question (#8), I assume you would add up the total years married to the same person. In your case, that would be 12 years. Of course, if you want to add the 5 years you were divorced then the number would be 17 years. It wouldn't make any difference in the score you would give your marriage.

4. On the conflicting attitudes question (#11), you would probably assume that you mostly agree with each other (+2 points) even if it takes awhile to reach agreement. If the conflict is too strong, then perhaps you should give your marriage 0 points.

Thank you for writing. I hope this helps.

Kerby Anderson

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