

“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

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