

Biblical Submission in Ephesians 5

What does the word "submit" mean in the Bible and how does it apply in the marriage relationship?

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words indicates that our word "submit" comes from the Greek word *hupeiko* (NT 5226) and means "to retire, withdraw, yield."

In the context of Ephesians 5:21-33 the Apostle Paul begins by addressing a "mutual submission" vs. 21 that Christ followers owe to one another. We are to be humble, bearing one another's burdens, not advancing ourselves above others, nor domineering over one another. The complete passage is an expression of God's ideal for marriage. He teaches that mature believers must be of a yielding and submissive spirit and ready always to "take up the towel of a servant" and wash the feet of others. From vs. 22 -24 he addresses the duty of a Godly wife to her husband, setting the church as an example of the wife's subjection, and ultimately in vs. 25-33 Christ as an example of love in husbands.

The marriage relationship was designed by God to be symbolic of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the Church. A woman of faith is to honor and obey her husband out of a deep reverence for her Lord Jesus. In all our human relationships we are to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). Thus, a Godly woman is obligated to provide her husband with gracious counsel. But, ultimately she is to submit to the leadership of her husband in everything that would not be criminal in nature or spiritually detrimental to her or her children.

While submission may appear to be a difficult task, the husband has a much more daunting assignment. He is to *love* his wife (willing for her the highest good) as Jesus loves the Church. As Christ exercises authority over the church to save and protect it, the husband is to exercise his authority over his wife by protecting, comforting, and providing her with every kindness within his power.

While the concept of submission is not popular in a proud and rebellious culture like ours, this is God's ordinance and should not be transgressed. Reverential fear of displeasing Him is the motive for discharging our proper duties as Christian husbands and wives (2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 Peter 2:13). The husband should not be a tyrant, and the wife should not be the governor. An archaic poem may summarize the concepts best:

*"Ill thrives the hapless family that shows
A cock that's silent, and a hen that crows:
I know not which live most unnatural lives,
Obeying husbands or commanding wives."*

