

Role of Submission in Marriage - Larry Coy

“Men, Women, and the Grace of Submission” — Sermon Recap

Understanding God, Our Identity, and Our Calling

Who God Is and How He Responds to Humans

- **God is Sovereign:** He orchestrates all circumstances, even difficult ones, to humble and transform hearts. He is bigger than any human authority, including a husband, and can “get through” to resistant individuals in ways we cannot. The king’s heart is in His hand (**Proverbs 21:1**), and He can turn it wherever He wills. Nothing is in jeopardy when God is in control.
- **God is Faithful and Gracious:** He meets believers in their trials, especially when a spouse is difficult, and sustains them. He protects what matters when we entrust our situation to Him.
- **God is Holy and Wise:** He has established an order for the home and calls each person to their role for the family’s flourishing. His Word provides practical guidance for the “nitty-gritties” of daily life, not just high ideals. A prudent wife is a gift from the Lord (**Proverbs 19:14**).
- **God’s Love is a Commitment:** God’s love is not based on feelings but on commitment. Jesus asks us to prove our love for Him by doing what He asks, which is the true test of commitment (**John 14:15** alluded to).

Who You Are in Christ and How You Are to Live

- **Identity:** Believers are called to trust God more than they trust their circumstances or a spouse’s reliability. A Christian wife is called to be a witness through her reverent, diligent, and faithful conduct in the home. She is not a victim of her husband’s decisions but has all of God’s resources at her disposal when she submits to His design.
- **Conduct:** Believers are to prioritize their household and marital responsibilities; good religious activities should not eclipse these primary callings (**Proverbs 31:27**). We are called to embody Christlike patience and steadfastness without self-righteousness. True obedience to God includes honoring the marriage

covenant and household duties. The primary source of contention is pride (Proverbs 13:10).

Detailed Sermon Summary

Introduction: A Principle for All Believers

The sermon begins with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate hearts to understand God's design for marriage. The central topic is the woman's role in submission, a widely misunderstood concept.

- **Submission Applies to All Believers:** The pastor clarifies that submission is not an exclusively female term but a biblical principle for every believer.
 - **Ephesians 5** calls all believers to "submit to one another in the fear of the Lord."
 - We are also called to submit to the Lord and to those in authority.

The Nature of Love and Conflict in Marriage

- **Love as Commitment:** A common reason for divorce, "I don't love him/her anymore," reflects a worldly view of love as a feeling. God's perspective is that love is a **commitment**.
 - **Pastor's Personal Example:** After five years of marriage, the pastor realized the "feelings" for his wife were gone because he had adopted society's view.
 - **Child's Profound Understanding:** The pastor's six-year-old son defined showing love as, "To do what you ask us to do, even though we don't want to do it," demonstrating love as an act of commitment.
- **The Root of Conflict: Pride:** Problems are inevitable in marriage. The key to resolution is having the other's best interests at heart.
 - The primary source of contention is pride. The Bible states this absolutely in **Proverbs 13:10**: "Only by pride cometh contention."

Defining Submission vs. Obedience

The pastor presents a critical distinction for understanding the wife's role.

- **The Key Point:**

i. **Submission is an attitude, and it is absolute.** It is the internal posture of the heart, meaning “to come under the protection of someone.”

ii. **Obedience is an action, and it is relative.** It is the external behavior.

- **Common Misconception:** Many women hear “submission” and think it means “obedience,” believing they must always change their mind to agree with their husband. This is incorrect.
- **Pastor’s Marriage Example:** For years, the pastor’s wife believed submission meant she had to be silent when she disagreed. He assumed her silence was agreement. This led to her harboring years of resentment, and he realized her silence was a form of dishonesty.
- **Correct Understanding:** God is telling wives to work on their **attitude**, especially when married to a difficult husband. A wife is not required to suppress her opinion, but to maintain an internal posture of respect for her husband’s God-given role.

Submission vs. Obedience in Practice

While a wife is called to have a subordinate spirit, this does not mean she must obey a command that violates Scripture (e.g., to lie, steal, or be immoral). The difference is in the *attitude* of the refusal.

- **Insubordinate Attitude:** “I will not! You’re not about to make me do that!” This is defiant.
- **Subordinate Attitude:** “Honey, I wish I could cooperate with you, but I can’t. You’re asking me to do something I can’t do.” This communicates refusal from a place of regret and submission to God’s higher authority, not rebellion.
- **Pastor’s Personal Example:** The pastor used to ask his wife to lie for him on the phone. This made her uncomfortable. They found a truthful solution: “I’m sorry, he’s not available right now.”

A Wife’s Attitude: The Turning Point

A wife’s attitude can be a powerful tool for spiritual influence, even without a word.

- **Pastor’s Anecdote:** The pastor’s wife used to nag him about leaving his shoes out. She changed her approach, telling him that seeing his shoes in the living room was a welcome reminder that he was home. This loving statement was more effective than her nagging and eventually inspired him to change his behavior voluntarily.

The Triangle of Disagreement: Husband, Wife, and God

When a husband and wife reach an impasse, the wife can appeal to a higher authority.

- **Appealing to God:** The pastor describes how when he makes up his mind, his wife, instead of getting angry, exhibits a calm “twinkle in her eye.” She internally turns the situation over to God, essentially saying, “Okay, Lord, get him.”
- **The Effect on the Husband:** This calm surrender makes the pastor nervous. It forces him to reconsider his position, knowing that if he is wrong, God may have to teach him the lesson “the hard way.”

Three Key Points for a Wife’s Heart

During a difficult seven-year period in his own marriage, the pastor confronted his wife’s use of the “silent treatment” as manipulation. He presented her with three points to resolve in her heart.

1. **Who is the Ultimate Authority?** A wife must decide: “Do you believe that I am your ultimate authority... or whether God’s bigger than me?”
 - **Scripture:** Proverbs 21:1 - “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD... he turneth it whithersoever he will.”
 - **Application:** A wife’s true security is in God, who is sovereign over her husband’s heart.
2. **The Value of a Prudent Wife:** The pastor confessed his failure to recognize his wife’s prudence (Proverbs 19:14)—her God-given intuition. He often dismissed her “feelings,” only to discover later she was right.
 - **Example:** He hired at least ten people against his wife’s advice and was burned every time. He was focused on logical credentials (the task), while she had insight into character. He saw her gift as nagging instead of a blessing.
3. **Trusting God with the Husband’s Failure:** A fundamental way God teaches a stubborn, prideful man is through **failure**.
 - **The Wife’s Role:** If a wife, driven by a desire to protect the family, pressures her husband to prevent any failure, she may usurp God’s role in his life. God may know the only way to teach her husband is to let him fail. The wife must be willing to go through that failure with him *without saying, “I told you so.”*

This confrontation led to a three-day internal struggle for his wife, but she ultimately had a breakthrough, resolving the issue in her heart by choosing to trust God as her ultimate authority.

Winning a Spouse “Without a Word” (1 Peter 3)

The call to submit is **supernatural** and requires God’s power. The pastor turns to **1 Peter 3** to address how a wife should respond when her husband is sinning or disobedient to God’s Word.

- **Scripture Context:** **1 Peter 3:1** states, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [behavior] of the wives.” This specifically addresses a husband who is not obeying the Word of God.
- **Example of God’s Leading:**
 - The pastor scheduled a counseling meeting at home on the same night as his wife Carol’s missionary meeting, breaking a promise to protect that time for her. He insisted they do both.
 - Carol disagreed but submitted with the “twinkle in her eye.”
 - The pastor’s evening was a disaster, with constant interruptions. He was unable to minister effectively.
 - When Carol returned, her presence immediately helped resolve the couple’s issue.
 - **The Lesson:** The pastor had to admit she was right. Her spiritual leading was correct, and because she trusted God, He worked through the situation to prove it. A wife who works on her attitude and trusts God “can’t lose.”

The Dynamics of Guilt and Witness in Crisis

- **Entrusting a Resistant Spouse to God:** When a spouse is burdened by guilt, they may lash out. The pastor counsels a woman whose husband fixates on her single outburst after his long-term mistreatment. The counsel was to let God handle it, as “God is the only One who knows how to get through to that guy.” Be ready to respond with grace when he hits bottom.
- **Testimony: Jim and Linda (1973 Recession):**
 - Linda became a Christian; her husband Jim resisted and mistreated her. After a series of financial crises (job loss, repossession, eviction notice), Jim hit rock bottom.
 - Linda remained calm and trusted God. Jim attended a financial workshop and came to Christ.
 - **Jim’s Testimony:** He wept, stating, “The worse I treated her, the more wonderful she became. If God can make a woman like that, I want to know Him.” Her transformed character was the witness that drew him to Christ.

- **Example of the Atheist:**

- The pastor counseled a new believer whose atheist husband forbade her from speaking to him. His advice was to obey her husband and then counseled her by phone on how to live out her faith.
- **Instruction:** Respond to his evil with good, his curses with blessings, and his hate with love (principles from the Sermon on the Mount). This is the practical application of winning him “without a word” through Christ-like behavior.

Final Warning and Guiding Principle

- **A Warning to New Christian Wives:** A common mistake is for newly zealous wives to become so church-absorbed that they neglect their primary responsibilities at home. From a non-believer’s perspective, this new religion appears to endorse arrogance and neglect.
- **The Proverbs 31 Principle:**
 - The guiding verse for a wife is **Proverbs 31:27**: “She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.”
 - She does not do “other ministry things” at the expense of her husband and children. This principle also applies to men, who must not pursue career or ministry at the expense of their families.

Pastoral Prayer and Commitment

The sermon concludes with a prayer for women to find encouragement in the call to submission and for all to have confidence that “nothing is in jeopardy” when God is in control, renewing a commitment to trust Him above all.