



1 Peter 3:1-7
Submission in Marriage Part 1

Summary: Defining what submission is and is not in Christian marriage.

There is an ever-widening gulf between the culture and the church in America today. And so - before we even begin - I need you to recognize what you're going to hear this morning represents a different point of view than what you hear from most of the other sources in your life. But, I hope that's why you came. I hope you came to worship this morning, to hear from God, to hear His view of things, even if - especially if - it doesn't line up with what you hear anywhere else.

I'm going to work to keep us anchored in Scripture, but I'm warning you again, as I have in the past: if you're listening, really listening, there will be something you don't like. And when it happens, I just want you to ask why? Why don't you like it? And then think: if Scripture says this, and I think or feel that, which one is right?

Because this is a very, very, important question you have to answer: does Scripture shape my view of culture and experience, or does my experience and culture shape my view of Scripture? Which one wins? Which one gets to control my life? Are you here to add a little bit of God's perspective to your way of thinking or to have your way of thinking transformed by God? That's a very important question.

Are you ready?

1 Peter 3:1 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.

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

I want to begin by drawing your attention to one very important word, found in verse one - it's the second word, **Wives, likewise**. It's repeated in verse 7, **Husbands, likewise**.

Likewise means what is being said now relates to what has been said already. And what is that? Well, Peter has been talking to Christians about submission to the government, and to masters or employers, now he comes even farther down the funnel and speaks of submission in the home.

So, remember what we have been saying – Christians are called to exercise derivative submission fueled by defiant faith. We are called to a pattern of conduct on earth anchored in our identity in Heaven.

- I submit to the King, the Emperor, the President, the governor, because I submit to the King of kings and He has told me to.
- I submit to my master or employer because I bow my knee before the Lord God Almighty and He tells me to.
- I submit to my spouse because Scripture says I am the bride of Christ, and He tells me to.
- I submit to my parents because God is my Heavenly Father and He tells me too.

All of my submission on earth is derivative – it is derived from my submission to God.

And it is fueled by defiant faith. I look my circumstances in the eye – maybe I don't want to submit to you, I think I know better than you, maybe you're not worth submitting to, I see all of that, feel all of that, know all of that, and I submit anyway, I defy these circumstances and my feeling and choose to walk by faith, trusting that God will see and reward my obedience as well as judge your incompetence and faults.

I choose to trust that, in the end, I will never regret submitting to God by submitting on earth, but by rebelling on earth, I may be rebelling against heaven, and so, by His grace and with His strength, I will obey.

Of course, that will not be easy. Something in us wants to resist. So, we're going to spend our time this morning trying to get a clear picture of what submission for Christian wives really means, and what it does not mean. We'll actually start with the negatives because I think they'll help us see things clearly and quickly. And then next week, we'll come back and talk about the specific application points Peter makes for both spouses.

So, if you're taking notes, let me give you 8 things Biblical submission in marriage is not.¹

1. Submission is not: an admission of inferiority. Actually, when you read the first pages of Scripture it says man was created first and he wasn't good enough on his own, so God created woman to fill the void. He needs her, and she needs him. Scripture says they are better together. She makes him something that he is not without her, and he makes her something that she is not without him.

¹ My thinking and notes here are helped by John Piper & Wayne Grudem's *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, chapter 10.

But what about Christian singles?

Well, here is where we need a really good grasp on how we think God works. When we say “she makes Him better,” and “he makes her better,” what we really mean is: *God uses her to make him better. God uses him to make her better.*

Your spouse is just the face God uses to work in your life. If your spouse were not there, God would still provide everything you need in more direct or different means. This is the promise and hope of Christian singles and it’s what keeps us from suffocating our spouse by thinking they are responsible for meeting all our needs directly - to the contrary, *God* meets our needs, *through our spouse*. Never look to a spouse, whether you have one or desire one, to save you from anything, always look straight to God.

Having said that, for most of us, God will often use a spouse to meet your needs. And men, if you are wise, you want as strong a woman as possible.

You know who wants a weak, soft, submissive, compliant woman that he can control? A weak man. If she’s not growing, neither are you. If she’s weakened in any area, so are you. It takes a strong arm to swing a heavy sword. You want a woman who presses you, challenges you, a woman who forces you to keep growing just to keep up with her, much less lead her.

Somebody sent me this post from Instagram recently and I love it.

It says: When I say I want a biblical wife
What people think I mean: I want a wife who is passive and subservient
What I really mean: I want a wife who is totally willing to drive a tent spike into a tyrant’s head should the opportunity arise



Now, the reference there is to Judges 4 where a woman named Jael runs into the general of a local army who had been harassing the Israelites. He’s actually retreating from battle and runs through her property, so she invites him into her tent, gives him some food, and pretends to stand guard while he rests for a bit, but when he falls asleep, she drives a tent stake through his head and kills him. That’s all in Judges 4.

And then the first comment on the post is a woman saying, “If you can’t handle me at my Judges 4-5, you don’t deserve me at my Proverbs 31.”

That’s what I’m talking about! If you want an adventurous life, you need an adventurous wife – you need a woman who will not only keep up with you, but who will press you to grow or be left behind. Don’t hate her for it, don’t hold her back, praise God for it. She’s making you better as she grows personally. Submission is not an admission of inferiority.

Here’s another thing to consider: in Scripture we see Jesus submit to the Father. He submitted to His parents on earth. He wrapped Himself with a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. It was the job of the lowest servant in the house, but He did it gladly to make a

point – if He could serve us, we could serve each other. And He did it all without giving up any of His inherent dignity and worth. As theologians have noted, a wife’s willful submission to her husband is like Christ’s submission to the Father, “the submission of one to another that is equal in importance and essence.”²

2. Submission is not: to all men, it is **to your own husband.** This is one of those passages of Scripture that does not apply to single women. It gets activated at the altar, and for that reason, this is one of the big things I talk to single women about – before you go saying “I do,” make sure you really can. Make sure he’s worthy of your submission.

3. Submission is not: Agreeing to everything. You may be married to an unbeliever; If he says, “I don’t want you to be a Christian,” what does you say? If he tells you to do something illegal, what do you say? It’s the classic alibi: you obey unless it is a sin to obey because the whole reason you’re obeying *is for the Lord.*

And if you have to defy, resist or rebel, you ask God for the grace to do it in such a way that shows honor even as you dissent. Submission on earth does have limits, there are things you should not submit to, but the way you dissent should look different than other rebels. And it should be for one reason: it’s not a matter of preference or having a different opinion that you think is better, *you’re resisting because to follow would lead you into sin.* Which brings us to:

4. Submission does not mean you stop trying to influence your husband. Peter specifically mentions women with unbelieving husbands and says they should winsomely and lovingly, try their hardest to convert him. But you do that through the weapons of prayer and example. You go to war for them in the heavenlies and then live before them on earth. And when the time is right, you say something about Jesus.

Ladies, whether your husband is saved or not, you have the opportunity to do him good in ways no one else can. You have the chance to see things no one else sees. And to say things no one else can say. By virtue of your marriage you have placement and access to do him good. And you should. You should try to influence him - with lots of prayer, with your example of a surrendered life, and with well timed and well-spoken words. Which means,

5. Submission is not leaving your brain at the altar because he’s going to make all the decisions now. Notice the section is addressed directly *to women.* Peter assumes they will hear this, think about it, pray about it, and respond to it directly. He doesn’t tell their husbands to tell them what to do.

Tim Keller says: “marriage diversifies your wisdom portfolio.” So, the better your spouse, the greater the depth and breadth of wisdom, knowledge, experience, and discernment you can draw from in making decisions.

² RBMW, 196.

A man who doesn't listen to his godly wife is a fool – especially if she's filling herself increasingly with Scripture and the wisdom of God, she is becoming increasingly valuable to him as life goes on. Women, do your family good by growing spiritually so that you're the best possible partner and counselor for your husband, your children, your friends, even your customers and clients. When you grow, you make everyone and everything around you better because you have more to give.

6. Submission is not: a character trait. We're not talking about someone who is easy going by nature. If you are, that's great, your flexibility will be an advantage in certain situations, but that's not what we're talking about. It's not really submission if you don't have a preference to do things differently. It's not really submission if you don't have to die to yourself.

7. Submission is not: getting all your spiritual strength and guidance from your husband. Submission does not mean depending on someone else to feed you spiritually. Notice in this passage he's not able to give her any spiritual guidance, because he's not saved. She's receiving everything she needs directly from God herself.

8. Submission is not living or acting in fear – you're not beaten into submission emotionally, spiritually, or physically and if you are, you need to get out of that situation and get help. You are not called to suffer abuse in the name of Christ and sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to turn someone in to the authorities so they don't harm anyone else. Paul endured beatings for the gospel when he had to, but he also got out of town when he could. Submission is a choice, it's not subjugation, oppression, or suffering harm.

Now, having said all that, let's look at what submission is. I've got three things for you.

1. Submission in marriage is, as we said earlier, **part of a general pattern for the Christian life.** After addressing the Christian response to government and the Christian response to masters or employers, now [wives, likewise.](#)

And so, our resistance to submission in marriage is really no different than our resistance to submission anywhere else: it's less about what we're facing and more about what we prefer. I don't want to submit in marriage because I don't submit anywhere, to anyone, about anything.

The problem is, that often bleeds over into a problem submitting to God. I asked a woman recently, what makes it hard for a woman to accept what Scripture says here? And she said, "The people I know that are pressing into the Lord don't have a problem with it and the people that aren't pressing into the Lord have every reason under the sun."

In other words, they can't exercise derivative submission fueled by defiant faith on earth because they're not working on submitting to God in Heaven.

Instead, we look for loopholes. Everyone wants their reason for rebellion sanctioned, whether it's resisting the government, my boss, or my spouse. Everyone is looking for a way out.

Meanwhile, Peter, under the inspiration of God, seems to be working really, really, hard to close all kinds of escape hatches.

He said submit to *every ordinance of men*, whether from the king or the governor. He said obey every master, whether they're good and gentle or harsh. And now he says, submit to your husband whether he's a believer or not, whether he's a good man or not.

So be honest, don't just struggle with what the Scripture says, struggle with how it says it. Notice what it says, recognize that maybe God is being intentional here, recognize that the first reaction of your flesh is probably to look for a way out and notice that God seems to be intentionally shutting you down. Why? What is He trying to teach us?

It seems like God is trying to pin us in place *so that* we will confront our pride and selfish desires. He's trying to help us see how much we love *ourselves*. When we are told to submit, we're told to think less of ourselves *and we don't like it*. But that's the root of all sin: saying, me and my desires go first! I want my way!

And when God says, "I want you to submit. I want you to choose to accept not getting your way," we don't like it. We howl and scream. We sulk and simmer. We stomp and pout. We lash out.

But, all throughout Scripture we're told to die to ourselves and look out for others. We read in

Phil 2:3 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

How can you look out for others when you're so busy insisting on yourself?

And if you say, well, I'd be happy to go along if my spouse wasn't such a mess, you need to see this.

Romans 5:6 (NLT) *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Jesus came and did us good when we least deserved it, when we weren't asking for it. And He was resisted. He was betrayed. He was deserted by His own disciples. If you're waiting

to submit until your spouse has it all together, you may be waiting a long time! Fortunately, Jesus never held us to a similar standard.

You see, here's why I think God is calling us to do something so unnatural, something so difficult: I think He's calling us to something we cannot do alone, He is calling us to the impossible *because He wants to strengthen us for the work.*

2. Submission is an act of worship. You know how to try and control your husband; you know how to try and manipulate circumstances, decisions, and outcomes. Are you going to go with that, or will you submit and trust God? Remember, submission is not passive, it is active and intentional, it is an act of defiant faith as you trust in God. And, notice, in verse 4 that it *is very precious in the sight of God.*

Ladies, when you respect your husband you're doing it as an act of worship to God, it is derivative, you're loving this man because you love your God. Don't see the downside of it all the time, see the glorious opportunity of it occasionally as well. David Guzik wrote: A woman can trust her own ability to influence and control her husband, or she can trust God and *be submissive.*

3. Submission is part of the spiritual war for the soul of another human being. Notice Peter says, I want you to submit, even in your husband is not a Christian, SO THAT he *may be won.* In other words, "The silent eloquence of your pure and reverent conduct can preach the transforming power of Christ every day."³

But you have to feel the pinch here, not only are you called to submit, not only are you called to submit *to an unbeliever*, you're called to do it all in such a way *that they see Christ in you and are won to the faith.* Now, who is sufficient for these things? You can't do this on your own, without Christ!

But again, maybe that's why we're called to do it. We're commanded to do the impossible SO THAT we will see our own need for Christ and find fellowship with Him as we join His cause.

We'll come back to all of this again next week and we'll look at the effect it should have on the way ladies dress, the clothes they buy, the way they style their hair, and what it all has to say to husbands.

Before we go though, let me ask: why is submission so hard for us? Why did it take us so long to get through this passage? Why do we have to come back to it? I want you to ask yourself: why do you hate that word?

If you find it hard to submit to the government, hard to submit at work, or at school, or on the field, anywhere you have to obey the person over you, or if you find it hard to accept the

³ Adapted from Clowney.

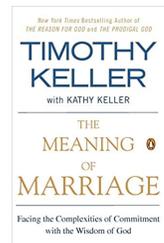
fact that in 21st century America this antique book still tells liberated, educated, accomplished women to submit to their husbands, *why is that so hard for you?*

And, how does it relate to the fact that the root of all sin is our refusal to submit to God? There's a lot to think about there, isn't there?

If you want to dig deeper into subject, or if you want to give your own heart, or perhaps your marriage a tune up, maybe even a complete overhaul, here are a few suggestions.

1. Read your Bible. This isn't the only passage that talks about marriage. Dig into other sections of Scripture and learn: what does the Bible say about marriage and my role in it? And if you want any help with that, reach out to the office or any of the pastors and we'll point you to some passages you can study on your own or with your spouse.

2. If you're looking for a good book, we recommend **The Meaning of Marriage** by Tim and Kathy Keller. They point out: "God is in the longest lived, worst marriage in the history of the world. God is the lover and spouse of His people but we have given Him the marriage from hell."



"Your marriage to Him is the best possible foundation for your marriage to anyone else."

They will help you work out some of the practical implications of what you find in Scripture. It's really good for those who are not married yet too, and you can find it on Audiobook if you don't read much or you drive a lot.

3. Find a Mentor Couple. Connect with a couple who has been married longer than you, and that both love God and love each other and ask them questions or get them to share stories. Neither Madeleine nor I grew up with our dads in the house. We're trying to figure out how to do this whole "both biological parents" thing while raising our own kids, so we have people we look to. In fact, even as the pastor of the church, I look to some of you who are little further down the road than we are and I ask – I know what the Bible says, but how did that play out in your family when you were at our stage?

We all have questions. We could all use examples. Don't be ashamed to ask.

Now, you can do all of that on your own, but if you need some special help – and there's nothing wrong with that – we do have marriage mentor couples available that can help you with some Biblical counseling as well. And if that's your need, contact one of the pastors or send us an email through the office.

I'll end with this. I asked some of our ministry leaders if they had any other books to recommend on marriage, or any other application steps I should mention and the first person to respond was Madeleine.

She said:

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Madeleine Schlenz

Die to yourself.
Repeat.
Repeat.

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No seriously I haven't read any of the books.

Die to yourself.

Repeat.

Repeat.

I love my wife because she is fierce and strong and yet incredibly attentive to the needs of others, and one of the hardest things I've ever done in life is trying to keep up with her.

Here's what she's saying. Start by asking God to help you recognize these issues in your life, ask Him to help you see them in real time. And when you realize that you're starting to feel like your mouth will be your best defense, stop and pray. Ask God for help right then and there in the moment. Ask Him to help you understand, why am I reacting this way? And ask Him to show you a new way out. Ask Him to help you establish a new pattern, set a new default.

And then do that over, and over, and over again.

Die to yourself.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Is it hard? Yes. But remember, you're not being asked to do anything Jesus didn't do. He submitted to His earthly parents, submitted to the government, paid taxes, all because He submitted to His Heavenly Father who sent Him to seek and save that which was lost, and so He prayed, nevertheless, not my will, but Your will be done.

Let's go before the Father and pray the very same thing right now.



Application and Discussion Questions

1 Peter 3:1-7

Submission in Marriage Part 1

- Is submission a hard concept for you? Why or why not?
- What are some bad examples you have seen of submission? What are some good examples, worth following?
- What do you think a good marriage looks like?
- What does it mean to be a good wife? Does being a good *Christian* wife look different in any way?
- What does it mean to have a good husband? How does having a good *Christian* husband affect things?
- What does it mean to exercise derivative submission fueled by defiant faith?
- We discussed eight things that submission is not. Which stood out to you?
- We discussed three things that submission is. Which stood out to you?
- How do you respond to Tim and Kathy Keller's observations that:

"God is in the longest lived, worst marriage in the history of the world. God is the lover and spouse of His people but we have given Him the marriage from hell."

And, "Your marriage to Him is the best possible foundation for your marriage to anyone else."
- What do you need to think about, do, or pray as a result of hearing this sermon?