

Coaching: Marriage Matters



Week 43

What is Biblical Submission? (Part 1 of 3)

In reading the Bible, you will find a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus. It contains a passage about marriage that is challenging to understand.

In Ephesians 5:24, Paul writes that “...wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” So, what exactly does this mean? What is Paul trying to teach us about the marriage relationship and the concept of submission?

Because the world and culture has changed dramatically since Paul wrote this passage, and because gender equality has become the accepted norm for most of western society, the idea that a wife is to categorically submit to the will of her husband is a notion that most women find difficult to accept and that most men dare not expect.

However, if what Paul wrote is considered in the larger context of Ephesians 5:21-33, you’ll find that the authoritarian tone set forth in the one verse is actually softened when the letter is read in full. For example, the concept of submission as explained in Ephesians 5:21 becomes more of a *reciprocal obligation* of one believer to another.

If we look at what was happening within the historical time-frame and cultural climate of Paul’s day, we come to understand that the Christian faith (which was a new development in society) was to first and foremost be an example of peace. Paul was urging his fellow believers to avoid discord and to keep the domestic peace by encouraging wives to recognize the husband as the head of the household.

Paul made it clear, however, that this headship in the family by the husband was not a position to be used for domination or oppression. He wrote that a husband is to love his wife “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.”

In addition to Paul’s message about submission, the apostle John makes an equally strong case for sacrificial headship by husbands. He references Jesus’ teaching that the greatest love is when a person lays down his life for another.

By His actions and by His words, Jesus instructs His followers to “...love each other as I have loved you.” This is the ultimate meaning of submission. And when and where there are questions about the concept of submission, it is most important to remember that there is but one to whom both the husband and the wife must submit, and that is Jesus Christ.

