

WHAT ABOUT SUBMISSION?

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Submission: A Biblical Concept

In recent months a number of articles have appeared in both secular and Baptist papers relative to teachings about submission of wives to their husbands. Much of this has been in reaction to the Southern Baptist Convention's change in their "Baptist Faith and Message" statements relative to marriage and the home. They had made some changes in 1998 in response to the modern, politically-correct approach to the subject. Correctly, in my opinion, they determined to reflect and emphasize biblical teaching on the matter.

Submission of wives to their husbands is indeed a biblical concept. It is taught explicitly in Paul's and Peter's writings. Perhaps Paul's most specific statement appears in Colossians 3:18: **"Wives, be submissive to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord."** His most detailed discussion is in Ephesians 5:19-6:7. Peter has a lengthy statement in 1 Peter 3:1-6.

Such statements call for all Bible-believing and Christ-honoring Christians to seriously consider what is taught. Apparently some people have either rejected plain Bible teaching or have misunderstood or misinterpreted just what is said. In the present article, I want to set forth a few conclusions concerning submission, based on these texts.

Submission: Not for Wives Only

The first thing that catches my attention is that submission is not just for wives only. In Ephesians 5:21, Paul includes both men and women when he says: **"submitting to one another in [the] faith of Christ."** "Submitting" is just one element of a long list of instructions about the Christian life, beginning with 5:15: **"working, . . . speaking, . . . singing and singing praise, . . . giving thanks, . . . submitting"** (these words are all in the same grammatical form, participles).

The discussion about submission begins with 5:21 and continues through 6:9. The grammatical form of "submitting" (masculine plural) indicates wives are not the only ones involved. He begins by referring to wives and husbands (21-32), continues with children and parents (even the word "fathers" probably means "parents" because the quotation refers to honoring "father and mother"), and concludes with slaves and lords (5-9).

Paul no doubt was not talking merely about submission of wives to their husbands; he had a much larger context and message. Indeed, the grammatical usage of the word "submission" at the beginning of these verses includes more than wives. In making these assertions, he is recognizing that submission is not just a Christian command; it addresses a larger issue. Submission is a fact of life.

Submission: A Fact of Life

New Testament instructions about submission are not new admonitions; they reflect a reality which existed even before Paul wrote his epistles. Most roles in society (e.g., the family, work, and government) operate under recognition of certain roles and relationships.

In each of the three types of relationships discussed by Paul, submission occurs in each side of the relationship. He mentions specifically submission of the wife to her "own" husband. Even in the marriage relationship, there is a certain amount of submission that the husband has to his own wife. Can anyone deny that when two people marry, each gives up a certain amount of independence or individuality? A wife makes decisions based on the desires of her husband, and a husband – if he truly follows Paul's admonitions about loving and nurturing his wife – will voluntarily give up a number of the prerogatives and freedoms that he had when single. For example, if he is providing financially for his family, he will forego a lot of personal expenditures that he may have had when he was single.

The same holds true of the parent/child relationship. When a child is born in a family, both father and mother voluntarily give up some of their personal freedoms and choices that they had before there was "another mouth to feed." Similarly, the child is to submit to the directions of the parents because they act in the best interests and love for the child.

Although we do not have lord/slave relationships today, we do have boss/employee relationships. In such relationships, there must be a voluntary submission in both roles if the work is to be accomplished and the mission of the company or enterprise is to be reached. The boss loses some of his freedom because he has the oversight and ultimate responsibility for the success of the work of the employee. The employee, of course, has voluntarily agreed to follow the directives of his employer.

All of these examples illustrate that such submission as taught by Paul occurs today in a number of aspects of life and society. Such submission is not just a fact of life, it is also something that is very good and worthwhile.

Submission: A Good Thing

Submission as taught by Paul is really good for marriage, the family, and society as a whole,

because that is how chaos is to be avoided and order is to be established and nurtured. Just as he does when discussing the citizen's relationship to the state and public officials (e.g., Rom. 13 and 1 Tim. 2), Paul clearly demonstrates his belief that order and subordination are very good so that chaos will not result. Peter takes the same position in his first epistle, even using the word "submit" or "subject" (1 Pet. 2:13).

The usual Greek words used by Paul and Peter in their discussions are various forms of the basic word *hupotasso*. The first four letters (*hupo*, or *hypo*) have the meaning of "under." *Tasso* is a word which signifies "appoint," "order," or "arrange." Apparently most recognized Greek authorities (e.g., Kittel, Robertson, Vine, Bauer) view *hupotasso* as a military term used to signify "to place under" or "to subordinate." Clearly, both words have the idea of avoiding chaos, or the lack of order.

Sometimes the word may be translated as "subject" or "subjection." Of the two English words "submission" and "subjection," probably "submission" brings out more of the voluntary aspect. When Paul wrote that Christians should be "**submitting yourselves to one another**" (Eph. 5:21), he is showing that such submission is voluntary. Use of the words "**to one another**" (a reciprocal pronoun) and "**submitting yourselves**" (a use of the middle voice) shows that submission is something **a person does to oneself**. It is **not done to him or her by someone else**.

Such submission is done for the good of the whole: e. g., the family, the church, and society. Jesus Himself explained that He was subordinate to His father: "**The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me**" (John 5:36) and "**I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do**" (John 17:4). Paul includes several of these same concepts when writing to the Corinthians: ". . . **the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman [is] the man; and the head of Christ [is] God**" (1 Cor. 11:3).

Paul succinctly brings out the idea of order and subordination also when he admonishes and states: "**Let every soul be subject [*hupotasso*] unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained [*tasso*] of God**" (Rom. 13:1). In short, God is the one who has "ordained" that there should be "order" in life. Peter states essentially the same when he wrote: "**Submit yourselves [*hupotasso*] to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake . . .**" (1 Pet 2:13). Without such order, we have chaos!

So, as Christians, we (husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, employees, citizens, and public officials) should be ready to willingly accept the God-ordained order to life and be willing to voluntarily accept our respective roles in life and **submit ourselves to one another**. Let us accept clear biblical teaching and not be caught up in the ever-changing cultural and politically-correct values of this age!

March 14, 2002

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