

The Controversial Issue of Biblical Submission - a Devotional by Rev. Keith Cobb

Dropping the word *submission* into conversation these days has about the same effect as announcing a waste lagoon is being built in the neighborhood. Even in evangelical churches where *sola Scriptura* and *the supreme authority of the Bible* are the banners flying over their Protestant past (and present), saints either seethe in silence or scream in anguish when *submission* is the topic.

Take, for instance, the response Bible-honoring premarital counselors most often get from bright-eyed brides and grooms when, in their valiant effort to underscore God's requirements of the love-smitten, they bring up the subject of submission. All sorts of nonverbal communiqués spring forth, each indicating disagreement – squirming, facial grimaces, or contortions -looks that range from panic to anger or, in most cases, a passive non-compliance... Looks that say: "How *archaic!* How *insensitive!* How *male!* And –well, how - yeah -- *chauvinistic!*"

But this is *a Bible thing*, though; one of those *won't go away* and *says it right here* texts (see Ephesians 5:22). God, through Paul, actually requires -expects -demands -instructs etc., a wife to submit to her husband "*as to the Lord*"?!

The Southern Baptist Convention boldly dealt with the issue a few years back and (rightly) concluded, "If God said it, then we're supposed to do it."

And the media said "Amen!" Right?

"Sure," they noted: "75 percent of the delegates and commissioners were males!" And, in those "*we're the judge of all these kinds of things*" attitudes, they added, "Besides, these are the simple-minded radical right wing Bible thumpers; what else would you expect?" (These *objective* commentators, it might be added, are the ones who claim to be standard-bearers for *tolerance* and *diversity*....)

Yes (*bless their hearts!*), some of those Southern Baptist women themselves did just like Sarah, Abraham's wife, and laughed at the whole discussion. (To fully appreciate that statement, go back and reread that sentence in light of I Peter 3:5, 6.)

Well, how did you react when that controversial issue surfaced? Or, better still, how DO you NOW react when the issue of submission is brought up?

For fun, try this unscientific (and kind of silly) test to see. *Mark through the word/phrase that doesn't seem to fit:*

- 1- Submission, joy, yielding, obedience
- 2- Relinquish, capitulate, contentment, surrender
- 3- Discover relief, subject to another, subordinate oneself, be the servant

Now, if you scratched *joy, contentment, discover relief*—you ... well, you... you are...
At least... **like most people!**

But in this case, the majority persuasion doesn't mean it's the "right" one. You see, scripturally, all the words/phrases used above "fit"; there isn't one that doesn't belong.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: "OKAY, IT'S DIFFICULT"

Just as the John 6:60 *distant* disciples complained that what they had just heard from Jesus was a *hard saying*, many of those who would like to get closer to Jesus find this teaching a hard saying as well. Unfortunately, too, because it can be the invisible force field that isolates them from an intimate closeness to Jesus.

Why is that?

Here, with annotation, are some reasons why our culture has such a difficult time with the concept.

1. Because of *misunderstandings*

Many of God's children stumble over this direct order from God because they somehow equate *submission* with *inferiority*. It just stands to reason, in our natural minds, that it must be so: to submit to another presupposes the superiority of the one over the other.

But, submission is not a matter of *rank* at all; our Lord Jesus Christ illustrates this, doesn't He? He turned this conclusion on its head by showing submission in every area of His life. He submitted to His Father; was He therefore *inferior* to His Father? Of course not. He submitted to the Law; was He *inferior* to the Law? NO...He gave the Law as the poet writes: "*The claims of law which He had made, unto the uttermost He paid.*" He submitted to human authority –the Roman government. Remember His "*render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's*" lesson? But was He inferior to a government which (as Paul later explains) was around in the divine and sovereign appointment and allowance of God (see Romans 13)? Jesus was never inferior to anyone or anything, yet He was in all ways submissive, and BECAUSE OF THAT, GOD HAS GIVEN HIM A NAME THAT IS ABOVE ALL OTHERS AND EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO HIM. Read Philippians 2. Isn't it clear that matter about superiority or inferiority at all?

What IS true is that it is a matter of *order*; it is a matter of *trusting His wisdom* versus *trusting our own fallen instincts*; it is a matter of God *protecting those He cherishes* rather than *relegating them to secondary and, therefore, less "important" roles*.

No, submission is not an issue about rank; it is an issue about trusting God.

2. Because of *cultural brainwashing*

It is quite obvious that the world system does not tout meekness, humility, servanthood, and submission as virtues to be sought after. Instead, society lauds aggressiveness and leadership and "control" as commendable qualities.

Still, as the psalmist says, "*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked*" (Psalm 1:1).

Our Lord Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" and "*Blessed are the meek*" and "*Blessed are the merciful*" (Matthew 5:3, 5, 7).

Consequently, *to submit or not to submit* (excuse me, Mr. Shakespeare) comes down to this: who are we to believe? Who are we to trust? The world's wisdom or our Lord's words?

Submission is not an issue about looking out for number one; it is an issue about trusting God.

3. Because of THE BIG "C" problem: *Control*

Here, at this point, we are approach the heart of the matter; most of us have a real problem with control, don't we? Feeling out of control is what creates those feelings of panic in our otherwise ordered worlds. To be out of control is to feel helpless. To be out of control means outcomes are not predictable; it means you are vulnerable –to being victimized, taken advantage of, hurt, mistreated.

But, in truth, how much are we really *in control* anyway?

We turn again to our Lord Jesus. He asked, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27). Hmm.

He told a parable illustrating the folly of feeling "in control." Read Luke 12:13-21. This farmer had *made it*; arrived. He was self-made, and now he would be self-sufficient. And with that brain that had so discerningly brought him prosperity by controlling the weather (?) and all the conditions necessary for good crops (?), he thought, "I'll now prudently manage my wealth and live in ease; I deserve it. I've earned it."

But the next day, his next thought was surely, "I'm not as much in control as I thought!" He began to see things from God's perspective: He saw God is in control.

King Nebuchadnezzar was feeling his oats one day, too. He saw himself as "the man." He was top gun. He was in control. Do you remember how he came to realize how wrong he was? It was when he was down on all fours eating his oats like an animal. He wrote about this experience for all of us who are "control" people instead of submissive saints.

Read Daniel 4:28-37 and wake up: none of us is in control after all.

But perhaps you've reasoned that if you do not submit to that man you're married to, or to those others God has entrusted a stewardship of care over you, that you'll be better off... you'll be "in control."

Sorry, you'll not be. God will not abdicate His throne for you. You will not be *the exception*.

Neither will the Almighty remove the consequences of disobedience to His commandment to be submissive just "for you." How absurd to presume thus!

Submission is not a matter of keeping control; you've never really had it in the first place. It is a matter of trust.

An Admission: "Okay, It's *discomforting*, but *Do-able*"

Agreed; it is not easy. But then again, neither is denying oneself, taking up a cross, and following Jesus daily, but *them's the rules of discipleship!*

What it boils down to (in case you haven't been reading between the lines) is *trusting God*.

Think about this: there are three degrees of submission. The first is submission to a superior; that's no problem... usually. The second is submission to an equal; that's tougher. And then, there's submission to an inferior—although our *humility* seldom permits us to admit that we feel superior to someone else.

Once again, our Lord is the example. He had no superiors; He was and is Lord. But He submitted to an equal, and did so with joy. "*My food*," said Jesus, "*is to do the will of Him who sent me*" (John 4:34).

Most surprisingly, however, is how He submitted to true (versus perceived) inferiors. Christ, standing before Pilate, yielded Himself completely, even to the violent extractions of His own blood.

How could He do that? Well, Hebrews 12:2 tells us that He did it "*for the joy that was set before Him*."