

Submitting to a Sinner

For Better or For Worse, Part 1

1 Peter 3:1

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Submission is not a nasty concept. In the previous passage, Peter was reminding the church about the submission of Jesus to God the Father and his ultimate plan of redemption. In this passage, Peter points back to Christ's perfect example to urge believing wives to submit to their husbands for the glory of God.

Discussion Points:

The concept of "submission" in this passage is inflammatory to many men and women alike in our world today.

- Why is submission such a divisive topic for this generation?
- Is Peter talking about submission in the same way that the world today grasps to concept?
- How does the biblical submission taught here differ from other terms such as "domination" or "dictatorship"?

Peter is not introducing a new concept of complementary roles for men and women.

- Where else does this idea show itself in the Bible?

Peter is giving the same instruction to all wives: to those who have believing husbands and to those who do not.

- Why does Peter not give different teaching to these two groups?
- What is the goal of this type of submission within a marriage?
- How does Peter say the behavior of the wife will impact her unbelieving husband?
- For a woman with a Christian husband: can her actions affect her spouse similarly?

Discussion Guide cont.

Marriage is difficult. That does not mean its practice should cease to exist. If worked at biblically, marriage should ultimately bring glory to God.

- Wives, how can you show practically your submissive attitude to your husband in a way that glorifies God?
- Husbands, how can you be a servant leader in your marriage to bring glory to God?
- Singles, how can you learn from Peter's teaching about marriage and bring glory to God at the same time?

Gospel Connection:

The closest human relationship in this world, marriage, is meant to show the beauty and majesty of the relationship between Christ and his church. Jesus showed humility love in his earthly ministry as the Savior of the world. He was willing to suffer and die in order to bring us forgiveness if we trust in him and submit to his authority in our lives.

Think: Are you reflecting the Gospel message in your relationship with your spouse? How can you show your spouse the same kind of love that Jesus pours out for the church?

If you are unmarried, are you submitting to Christ's rule in your life now? Think about what you can learn now and how you can be preparing for marriage in the future if that is in God's will.

Pray: Thank God for his great love for you. Ask him to help you honor both Him and your spouse through your marriage. Ask him to bring godly couples into your lives for encouragement and fellowship.

If you are unmarried, ask God to prepare your heart for whatever he may have in store for you in the future. Ask him to mold you into a humble servant to bring people into your life that you can love the way he loves you.

Respond: Take to heart the teaching of Peter. Live your life with the ultimate purpose to bring glory to God in all that you do. Glorify him through your actions and through your relationships.

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1 Peter 3:1

One of the most recognizable songs on the planet is the wedding march; an opera tune written in 1850 by composer Richard Wagner. And when you hear it, you immediately think of the words, “Here comes the bride, all dressed in white” even though those lyrics were made up and added a hundred years later.

After Princess Victoria used this as her processional when she married Prince Frederick in 1858 it became all the rage – and is to this day the most used wedding processional.

I learned recently that the original sheet music, in Richard Wagner’s own hand, was sold just a couple of years ago for 3.5 million dollars.

But then again, everything about weddings is expensive, right? One of the biggest industries today is the multi-billion-dollar-a-year wedding industry.

I have read that the average wedding today is costing couples – and/or their parents – anywhere from \$20,000 dollars to \$70,000 dollars on average; that includes all the expenses, the dinners, the travel, the printed materials, the rentals, the photographs, the reception and – of course, the wedding gown.

Everyone wants the perfect wedding. And there’s nothing wrong with wanting an incredibly beautiful wedding – unless you’re father of the bride – a backyard wedding and a cookout sounds really good.

But why not shoot for perfection! You want the perfect beginning for two people who walk into that ceremony, single; and in a matter of 20 minutes, they’re going to leave that ceremony, married. Married! With all its implications and responsibilities – yet unknown.

And every married couple knows – it won’t be long after that ceremony when the reality of marriage hits, and the work begins.

Paul David Tripp in his book for couples entitled, “What Did You Expect?” compared a wedding to a vacation brochure. He writes, “Unrealistic expectations always lead to disappointment. You know this is true if you’ve ever looked at a vacation Website before traveling there. No vacation site will

every look as nice or function as well as that promotional website. We took our family to Disney World. We had looked at all that beautiful Disney literature. But we were never told that we would have to stand under a blazing sun in 120-degree heat and 100 percent humidity for an hour and a half – just to ride a ride that lasted 33 seconds.”ⁱ

The truth is, when you stood and repeated those vows:

- For richer or for poorer – you had no idea how poor it would be;
- When you promised – For better or for worse – you had no idea how worse it could get.

I love the humorous, tongue in cheek story I read some time ago; Three months after her wedding day, the young bride rushed back into the pastor’s office, hysterical. She said, “Pastor, my husband and I had our first big fight together – and it was really bad . . . it was just awful . . . now what am I going to do?” The Pastor said, “Just calm down . . . this isn’t as bad as you think; every marriage has to have its first big argument . . . it’s okay.” She said, “Well ok, but what am I going to do with the body?”

- You know, maybe there are reasons why our world has grown skeptical of making this kind of commitment.
- Maybe there’s a reason you can now lease wedding rings a month and a time.
- Maybe there’s a reason the traditional vow of “as long as life shall last” has been rewritten to say, “as long as love shall last.”

In 1960, 70% of all adults were married; today, that number has dropped in half.ⁱⁱ

Now, more and more couples are cohabitating than marrying.

I think it was summarized really well by an unbelieving actress, just a few weeks ago who was interviewed shortly after separating from her second

husband. She made this telling statement – “I think the idea of marriage is romantic; it’s a beautiful idea” . . . she then said, “I don’t think it’s natural to be a monogamous person . . . it’s a lot of work.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, if it’s beautiful, it shouldn’t be so much work. So she’s come to the conclusion that commitment to one person – through a monogamous marriage covenant – is unnatural. And in a very real way, she’s put her finger on the issue – even though she tragically doesn’t know the solution.

It’s true, marriage cannot become naturally what God wants it to become; it must involve spiritual wisdom; spiritual commitment and a spiritual motivation.

The Bible says; ***by wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches (Proverbs 24:3 & 4).***

That’s quite a promise – by God’s wisdom a home – a marriage – is ***built***, it is ***established*** and it is ***filled*** with precious things.

So where can you find God’s wisdom that can build and establish and fill a marriage and a home with the right things? I’m glad you asked.

Turn in your copy of the New Testament, to the first letter from the Apostle Peter – ***I Peter and chapter 3.***

I’m going to preach at least 5 sermons on this paragraph written to wives and husbands. The problem is, I’ll only be able to preach the first 2 sermons, this Sunday and next, before our summer series begins.

So, we’re going to have to stop half way through; which means we’ll only have time to deal with the wives first – the good news is you’ll have all summer to get over it – and then we’ll tackle the husbands.

Verse 1. In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Just this first phrase – ***In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands.***

In the same way, makes you immediately ask the question, “in the same way as what?” And the immediate context a few verses earlier points us to the submission of the God the Son to God the Father

in submitting Himself faithfully to the will of the Father in the plan and purpose of redemption.^{iv}

Submit to God’s purposes like He did – our supreme example in submission and in humility.

The larger context which began in ***verse 13 of chapter 2*** includes the believer’s submission to the institutions of government and authorities, ordained by God, even when they are ungodly.

Then later on in ***verse 18***, this verb ***to submit*** takes us into the world of domestic servants and the equivalent modern day employee/employer relationship which we studied in detail.

And now in chapter 3 Peter writes, “In the same way, wives be submissive to your husbands.”

Now be careful here; Peter is not telling wives to submit to their husbands like you submit to your emperor or to your employer. And I would certainly hope not. You might follow orders and decrees and codes – but that definitely wouldn’t lead to the kind of marriage that fills its rooms with precious and pleasant riches.

This opening adverb translated – ***in the same way*** – means that the citizen and the employee and the wife – and even the Lord, submit with the same sacred motive and with the same sacred perspective.^v

They are ultimately submitting “in the same way” – that is, out of love for and obedience to and for the exaltation of the glory of God and His wise purposes and plans, which we may not fully understand.

So you could write in the margin above this phrase in ***verse 1 – In the same way*** – and add there in the margin a notation – ***for the glory of God – be submissive to your own husbands.***

Now you might have already skipped ahead through this paragraph, instead of listening to me – and you might have notice that there are 6 verses dealing with the wives and only 1 verse dealing with husbands.

That seems lopsided – *6 times more* information given to wives than husbands. And some men might say, that’s because we don’t need as much instruction. I don’t even want to see you after the service . . . I’m going to let your wife take care of you. That’s not the reason.

Someone might think, well, maybe it’s because women love information more than men – I mean, they actually read the directions where men most often won’t.

Amen to that idea, but we’re still guessing.

I would agree with one New Testament scholar who suggested that more space is devoted to Christian wives here simply because many of them had husbands who were either indifferent or opposed to Christianity.

And that definitely fits the context here – submitting to husbands – *who may not be obedient to the word.*

Let me tell you that over my years of ministry, it's easily 6 times more likely for a devoted Christian wife to be suffering from an un-spiritually minded husband than the other way around.

I think that's exactly the problem here in Rome and today in America – and women want to know how to respond – how to submit – how to respect their husbands when they're in this most difficult situation of having husbands who aren't interested in the word of God.

One author wrote, no specific group of members in the church was more in need of warm encouragement, wise spiritual counsel and understanding than these wives – many of whom were now married to unbelievers. And for a Christian wife in 1st century Rome to abandon the pagan religion and lifestyle of her husband, would be to invite acute problems.^{vi}

Now, while Peter is speaking to all wives – in every marriage – he's reminding these wives especially that the creation model of headship and submission applies to them too – in fact, it was more important than ever – if their husbands were not responsive to the gospel.

Notice verse 1 again – *you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word . . .*

More on that “wordless testimony” next Lord's day. For today, what exactly does it mean for a wife to be submissive?

Just mention the word submission and many women in our culture – and even in the evangelical church today bristle with suspicion and even anger. Submission is probably one of the most controversial practical subjects in the New Testament.

Well let me tell you what submission is not. It is not based upon the belief that women are inferior, morally, intellectually, emotionally or spiritually.

Furthermore, submission is not blind obedience where the wife becomes a doormat for the man to walk over – where she isn't allowed to make any

decisions or suggestions or exercise any management responsibilities. That may be how other religions in the world treat women – that isn't Christianity.

In fact, if you'll just stay with me long enough in this series – we'll eventually get to where Jesus through Peter tells men that if they misuse their authority and treat their wives callously or unkindly, they might as well stop praying because God's not listening.

Further, biblical submission is not the basis for subjugation, or verbal or physical abuse. In fact, if you're listening to me and your husband is physically abusing you, and you're hiding the bruises as best you can – let me encourage you to call the police and then let us as your shepherds provide you with help and provision and counsel – for both you and your husband.

You won't be the first one for whom we've provided sanctuary over the years. Submission is not a free pass for violence or even bad behavior.

Warren Wiersbe wrote it this way; Headship is not dictatorship, but the loving exercise of divine authority under the lordship of Jesus Christ.^{vii}

Still others would say that submission and headship are the result of the fall of Adam and Eve – that submission and headship were never God's original design.

But the truth is exactly the opposite of that. Adam and Eve were created with the inherent roles and responsibilities of headship and submission, respectively. And they had perfect unity and transparency and cooperation.

Sin actually involved the violation of the principle of submission as Eve acted on her own authority in response to Satan's offer – and then Adam violated the principle of headship in submitting to Eve's offer.

Following the fall of Adam and Eve, God delivered the effects of the curse to them in Genesis 3. Man will now work by the sweat of his brow – and woman's desire will be for their husbands – literally – her desire will be to dominate and control her husband (Genesis 3:16 along with chapter 4:7).

So the battle of the sexes – and the battle in the marriage – came as a result of sin. Cooperation turned into competition. Wedlock turned into deadlock.

John Piper put it well when he wrote, “When sin entered the world it ruined the harmony of marriage not because it brought headship and submission into

existence, but because it twisted them; it twisted man's humble, loving headship into hostile domination or lazy indifference. And it twisted woman's intelligent, willing submission into manipulative deference or brazen insubordination. Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive.^{viii}

So what the Holy Spirit through Peter is beginning to explain to us in this paragraph will be nothing less than a radical reversal of the effects of the curse in Genesis chapter 3. A return to the kind of relationship God intended from the beginning for a husband and his wife.

So what *is* biblical submission? The Greek verb Peter uses here is *hupotasso*, which means to willingly rank under.^{ix} It's an administrative term which means to voluntarily assist – in order to complete.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, a former pastor and theologian, pointed out that in both the Greek and Latin languages, the word carries with it the idea of providing a foundation – personal assistance as a helper fit for him/the husband. Therefore, a woman with this God-glorifying perspective can say, “As I voluntarily submit to my husband, I am completing him. I am helping him fulfill his responsibilities, and I am helping him become the man, the husband, the leader God intended him to be.”^x

And how do we know Donald Grey Barnhouse made the right observation? We know because that observation fits perfectly with God's creation design, revealed to us in *Genesis chapter 2 and verse 18* where God made that rather startling statement – ***It is not good.***

That was the first time in the early days of creation where something was categorized as “not good.”

Everything God had created in *Genesis chapter 1* was summarized with the repeated statement, “***And God saw that it was good . . . and God saw that it was good.***”

But now He says, “There's something that isn't good” – He says further in *verse 18*, ***It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.***”

So the concept of submission and assistance to the man existed in the Garden of Eden, long before sin occurred.

God said, “I'm going to make man a help-meet. In other words, I'm going to create for Adam a personal assistant – in every way; and the implication is that Adam will then be able to accomplish God's purposes for his life, which he would not have been able to accomplish without her assistance.

That doesn't mean that a single man or woman for that matter can't complete God's assignment for their lives. This is simply God's creative design in general for those who marry.

And for those who do – to whom Peter is addressing here – this is one of those defining roles of the helpmeet – the assistant.

Let me illustrate this concept with a personal analogy – Do you have an administrative assistant at work? Do you have an assistant in the shop or in the store or in the office?

- Are they less valuable as a person than you?
- Are you superior to them as an individual because you have more responsibility?
- Are you better than they are because you make more money?
- Are they inferior to you in character and essence because they assist you?
- Are you closer to God because you're their administrator and they're your assistant?

Of course not.

So likewise, the husband isn't superior or better or more valuable or closer to God or more important to God's purposes and plans.

And by the way, is that assistant at work really helpful to you:

- if they never offer any ideas,
- or question you,
- or correct you,
- or improve what you're doing
- or suggest doing it differently
- or tell you that you forget what you were supposed to be doing?

Listen, if your assistant doesn't do any of that, they probably aren't giving you any real, valuable assistance.

Likewise, the submissive wife who voluntarily ranks under and assists her husband will offer ideas, ask questions, make corrections and improvements and suggest options and other ideas and remind you of things you need to do or forgot to do.

So the world's idea of submission is very different from God's idea of submission, through the Apostle Peter.

The world sees submission as:

- Second-class
- Inferior
- No initiative
- No backbone
- Unassertive
- Cowering
- Non-resistant
- Compliant

Scripture sees submission as:

- Loyalty
- Helpfulness
- Faithfulness
- Adaptability
- Deferential
- Completing
- Assisting^{xi}

It is voluntary selflessness.^{xii}

Submitting to a husband's leadership is a choice to complement him with her unique gifts and talents rather than compete with him.

Biblical submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.^{xiii}

In other words, wives – the principle and beauty of Biblical submission is rooted in the creative act of God who knew what your husband would need and thus, like Eve – the first wife – God created *you* with your unique gifts and talents to complete him – which means that *together*, you make a complete package.

Haven't you wondered why God puts opposites together? Why two people who are so different are brought together by the wise direction of God's Spirit.

All those differences . . . and that happens to be one of the most irritating things about marriage and at the same time the most enduring, protecting, balancing aspect of marriage.

I'll never forget a man telling me after church one day how different he and his wife were – in every possible way. He'd been married for more than 50 years too and he said they were still so very

different. This wise, older godly man looked at me and laughed as he said, "The only thing my wife and I have in common is that we were both married on the same day."

Before we wrap up our study today – in many ways, simply an introduction to a very broad subject – let me provide you with 3 general reminders.

1. First, remember that you are building your marriage in a fallen world.

In a very real way, you're trying to build your marriage in a culture that is constantly trying to steal your tools.

You're busy trying to build something and people around you keep trying to take your pliers and hammer and screwdriver and wood glue and nails . . . and whatever else you have in your toolbox you're trying to use to build your marriage.

The world system is a gravitational pull away from selflessness and back into selfishness.

William Barclay wrote that submission is when a woman voluntarily chooses selflessness – submission is the death of pride.^{xiv}

And the world is constantly sending you messages – "What? That isn't going to be good for you – you won't be fulfilled that way!"

Yes you will. The happiest, most fulfilling moments of life are selfless moments where pride is crushed and humility rises to serve someone else.

Like Jesus Christ – who happens to be the most fulfilled person to ever walk on the planet – who humbled Himself and took on the role of a servant (Philippians 2).

2. Secondly, remember you committed yourself in marriage to a fallen sinner.

You happened to have married a sinner. Can I get an amen? You married a sinner and you are a sinner too . . . in fact, marriage is the union of sinners.

And what do sinners do? One author wrote, sin turns us in on ourselves. Sin makes us shrink our lives to the narrow confines of our little self-defined world; sin causes us to shrink our focus and concern to the size of our own wants, needs and feelings. Sin causes us to be way too self-aware and self-important. Sin causes us to be offended most by offenses against us and to be concerned most for what concerns us. Sin is essentially antisocial. We

don't have time to love others and we don't have time to love our spouses because we are too busy loving ourselves.^{xv} That's what sinners do.

Peter is implying here as this topic opens in chapter 3, that marriage is not an escape from sinners, it is an attempt to glorify God by winning sinners to glorify God . . . by demonstrating the gospel to them just as Christ loved us – *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)*.

3. Remember, thirdly, a fallen spouse is God's assignment for developing grace.

When your ears hear and your eyes see the sin in your spouse, it is never an accident – it is the plan and purpose of God to demonstrate through you, the loving confrontation and the transforming work of grace – the sharpening of iron against iron. These are the moments, one author wrote, when marriage becomes ministry.^{xvi}

Who ever thought that your marriage would become a ministry; and ministry is hard work, right?

Ladies, before you were married you were looking for someone “just right” to marry – you were looking for Mr. Right. And then you found him. But after marriage you discovered that he isn't always Mr. Right. In fact, you soon began to wonder if you married Mr. Wrong.

The truth is, we always marry the wrong person – so to speak; and if we're honest, marriage shows us that we're the wrong person too.

In fact, marriage is the great revealer of how wrong we are, on so many levels! And how different we thought each other were, during courtship, than the people we realized we were after marriage.

One of the first challenges of marriage is learning to love the stranger to whom you find yourself married.^{xvii}

This is nothing less than God's plan to work in us and through us the development of and the demonstration of grace.

David Tripp wrote, “The flaws you see in your spouse are not accidents – they are the tools God has planned to use to pry you out of the worship of self and into the worship of God.”^{xviii}

- So remember, you are building your marriage in a fallen world.

In other words, there are times when you are going to feel in marriage like you are riding a bicycle in the sand . . . just keep pedaling.

- Secondly, remember, you are committed in marriage to a fallen sinner.

Marriage is God's intentional plan of uniting two sinners and making them followers of Christ.

- Thirdly, remember, a fallen spouse is God's assignment for developing and demonstrating grace.

And it begins in 1 Peter 3 with a wife submitting to a sinner, and in so doing, demonstrating the ministry of marriage, and the grace of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/28/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Paul David Tripp, What Did You Expect? (Crossway, 2010), p. 16
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- iii Scarlett Johansson, "News: People" The Week (3-10-2017)
- iv Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 185
- v Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH, 1984), p. 195
- vi Adapted from Hiebert, p. 194
- vii Warren W. Wiersbe, 1 Peter: Be Hopeful (David C Cook, 1982), p. 81
- viii John Piper, "Husbands Who Love Like Christ and the Wives Who Submit to Them," sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church (6-11-8)
- ix John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 177
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- xi Adapted from Rainer, p. 158
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- xiii David Boehi, Brent Nelson, Jeff Schulte & Lloyd Shadrach, Preparing for Marriage (Bethany House, 2010), p. 172
- xiv Barclay, p. 219
- xv Tripp, p. 47
- xvi Adapted from Tripp, p. 51
- xvii Doriani, p. 120
- xviii Adapted from Tripp, p. 52