

Mutual Submission (part 2)

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Submission Does Not Mean You're Are Wrong

Mutual submission is neither a new concept, nor an unorthodox one. Paul has much to say, in fact, on the subject. Consider the perpetually confounding situation presented to many first century Christians when it came to judgment calls on eating certain foods or celebrating certain days.

- *“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him”* (Romans 14:1-3).

When it comes to disputable matters of conduct, based on conscience or judgment, recognizing the importance of submission is the key to peace in all our relationships. Paul goes on to say,

- *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way...If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died...So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food...”* (Romans 14:13-15,19-21)

The natural pattern in any relationship is for the “leader” to break the tie with his vote. In a marriage, this often means breaking the tie with his “head of the household” vote. What ends up happening, though, is that we allow our stubbornness and selfish desires to trample the desires of our mate. Because we want to spend money a certain way, we do it (and make our wives feel bad for their luxuries). Because we want our children disciplined a certain way, we undermine our wives. Because we want a certain amount of sex, or we want it done in a certain way, we demand it on the grounds of 1 Corinthians 7. Examine your life carefully and you will find this in even the mundane activities of life: which movies we watch, who we spend our time with, how much free time we give to our mates, what TV shows we watch, our diets, our activity level, our homes, our cars – Almost every aspect of life can be commandeered by a husband if he chooses to constantly use the “head of the household” card! Instead of wives who cheerfully, lovingly submit, we have wives who are trampled into submission.

This is where mutual submission comes in. On the same subject as meats and other judgment calls, Paul makes an interesting statement in 1 Corinthians 8:13, *“Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.”* In Romans, Paul used the words “tear down”, “hurt”, and “destroy” to describe what unilateral, stubborn exertion of will does to a person. Just because we choose to submit to another, whether spouse or not, does not make us either

wrong or weak. In the case of a marriage, it certainly does not mean that we relinquish our authority as husbands.

A husband and wife submit to each other for different reasons. *“Our mutual submission in marriage must deepen until it parallels the mutual submission found between Christ and His bride. The wife must submit fully to her husband’s authority, as the church submits to Christ’s authority, out of reverence for God. The husband must submit fully to oneness, as Christ sacrificially submitted to oneness with His bride. Thus both husband and wife submit, but differently”* (Every Woman’s Desire, Stoeker, p. 45). If there is a semantic issue with the word “male submission”, then so be it. But that is what is going on in an ideal marriage. Paul clearly teaches that the submission is not a one-sided relationship (Ephesians 5:25). There is nothing unbiblical about saying that a husband ought to submit to the needs of his wife, as a human head often must submit to the needs of the body (hunger, exhaustion, injury, etc.).

Is not oneness in marriage worth the mutual submission? Ask yourself, “Is there really any habit or decision that I would not sacrifice if I knew that marital oneness was on the line? Is there any choice that I would not compromise on if I knew that my options were encouraging my spouse or trampling her spirit?” In situations where conflict arises, especially matters of judgment or conscience, what are we willing to give up in order to love each other the way that Christ and His bride do?