

The Christian Home (9): Wifely Duties (part 2)

Having considered the first of three major duties for wives last week (reverence), we come this morning to the second (submission), leaving the third for next week (assistance).

The duties of the wife may be reduced to this one, viz. submitting herself to her husband as her head (Eph.5:22-23). She is not to lord it over him, but to be subject to him. And in this respect, there is a reverence and fear of the husband enjoined in the wife (Eph.5:33; 1Pet.3:2), which is a due regard in the heart to his character as husband, seeing in that God has put His own name upon him, as God Himself is called our husband. This leads to a fear to offend him, flowing from love, venting itself in speaking and acting respectfully to him (1Pet.3:6).¹

I. Wifely Submission

1. *Its nature.* "Wives, submit to your own husbands" (Eph.5:22). "The word, *submit*, signifies a subordination, or orderly subjection of the wife to the authority of her husband" (Swinnock).² Thus, at the heart of wifely submission is the acknowledgement of God's creational and functional distinction between a man and woman. "Subjection is that dutiful respect which subordinates have towards those whom God has set over them. By it they manifest a willingness to yield to that order which God has established" (Gouge).³ Thus, wifely submission expresses itself in obedience. "Let the older women admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands" (Tit.2:3-5). The wife must subject her will to that of her husbands.

To be subject and obedient, is to take the understanding and will of another to govern you, before (though not without) your own; and to make your understanding and will to follow the conduct of his that governs you. Self-willingness is contrary to subjection and obedience.⁴

2. *Its spring.* "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph.5:22). "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col.3:18). These verses underscore both the "why" and "how" of wifely submission. Wives must submit to their husbands because they are in Christ who commands them. Wives submit yourselves to your husband "as a part of your submission to the Lord" (Jones).⁵ Wives obey their husbands in obedience to Christ, by the power of Christ, and for the glory of Christ. (1) Wives obey their husbands in obedience to Christ. "Wives must submit to their own husbands because it is a part of their duty to the Lord, because it is an expression of their submission to Him. They do not do it, in the last analysis, for the husband's sake; the ultimate reason and motive does not rest there; the submission is 'unto the Lord.' They are doing it for Christ's sake, because they know that He exhorts them to do it, and because it is well-pleasing in His sight" (Jones).⁶ Wifely submission is obedience to Christ.

(2) Wives obey their husbands by the power of Christ. Wives should obey their husbands as those who are in Christ. They must render Christian obedience, or that obedience which derives grace and strength from Christ. Wives, just as children, must obey "in the Lord" (Eph.6:1). That is, in union

¹ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:217

² George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:509

³ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:30

⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 440

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, 101

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, 101-102

with Christ. (3) Wives obey their husbands for the glory of Christ. They must submit to their husbands because they love Christ and desire to glorify Him. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col.3:18). That is, as is proper for those who name the name of Christ. Who profess to be wed with Him by faith. "Older women must admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit.2:3-5). Wives who disobey or disrespect their husbands, provide others with occasion to speak evil against God and the Christian religion.

3. *Its grounds.* The grounds of wifely submission are two: husbands are the head and protector of their wives. "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body (i.e., preserver or protector)" (Eph.5:23). (1) Man is head of the woman. "For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1Cor.11:8-9). This refers to creation and Adam's headship over his wife (Eve). Wifely submission is grounded upon God's order in creation and presupposes the context of marriage. "A wife must submit herself only to that one, proper husband, and to no other man. The duty required is that a wife must yield a chaste, faithful, matrimonial subjection to her husband" (Gouge).⁷ Thus, wives are to submit to their own husbands and not men in general. "The Bible does not require the submission of women to men, but rather of *a woman to a man*" (Wilson).⁸

The submission of a woman to a man, far from making her submissive to other men, *protects* her from obligations to other men. This provides her with an umbrella of protection (that is, her husband) from other men. She is to be submissive to her *own* husband, and the Bible teaches clearly that no one can serve two masters.⁹

(2) Man is the savior (protector) of the woman. "Though Christ be properly the Savior of the body, yet even here a husband carries a similarity of Christ, and is after a manner a 'Savior,' for by virtue of his position and office he is her *protector*, to defend her from hurt and preserve her from danger, and a *provider* of all needed and necessary things for her" (Gouge).¹⁰ "The wife is kept, preserved, guarded, shielded, provided for by the husband. As Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, so the husband nourishes and cherishes the wife – and the wife should realize that that is her position in this relationship. The husband is the preserver, he is the savior of the body. The wife then should start with this idea, and she should always act in the light of it" (Jones).¹¹

4. *Its pattern.* "Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph.5:24). "O Christian wives, as your husbands resemble Christ by their position, so you resemble the church by your practice" (Gouge).¹² In the same way as the church submits herself to Christ, so wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands. (1) Humbly. "The first hinderance to a wife's subjection is pride; which makes the wife think highly of herself" (Davenant).¹³ "Contrary to humility is pride, which puffs up wives and makes them think there is no reason they should be subject to husbands; they can rule themselves well enough, yes, and rule their husbands too" (Gouge).¹⁴

⁷ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:30-31

⁸ Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, 34

⁹ Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, 34

¹⁰ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:176

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, 122

¹² William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:179

¹³ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:156

¹⁴ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:161

Humility is that grace that keeps one from thinking highly of himself above that which is proper, and regarding that low view which he has of himself makes him think reverently and highly of others. If humility is placed in a wife's heart, it will make her think better of her husband than of herself, and so make her the more willing to yield all submission to him.¹⁵

(2) Lovingly. "An unloving submission is deeply offensive to God. It is the posture of a body, not the love of a heart. Christians have every cause to love the Lord and to comply humbly to His headship. In like manner, wives are to submit to their husbands in love, not out of a sense of mere duty" (Hamilton).¹⁶ (3) Cheerfully. "Cheerfulness is more apparent than sincerity, and makes submission the more pleasing not only to God, but also to man, who by the effects of it may easily discern it. When a husband sees his wife willingly and cheerfully perform her duty, it cannot but raise up love in him. This cheerfulness is manifested by a ready, quick, and speedy performance of her duty" (Gouge).¹⁷

(4) Sincerely. "Sincerity is that grace that makes one to be *within* even in *truth*, what *without* he appears to be *in show*" (Gouge).¹⁸ "Contrary to sincerity is hypocrisy, and mere outward submission in words, when a wife even despises her husband in her heart. For as many outward imperfections are pardoned by God, where sincerity is, so no outward actions are accepted of Him though they seem never so fair, where there is no sincerity" (Gouge).¹⁹

William Gouge provided three reasons "that wives should submit themselves in sincerity":²⁰ first, "though their husbands who are but men see only the face and outward behavior, Christ sees their heart and inward disposition"; second, "in this lies a main difference between true, Christian, religious wives, and more natural women who may be submissive for personal ends; that their husbands may love them more, or live more quietly and peaceably with them; but Christian wives respect Christ's ordinance, by which their husbands are made their head, and yield to His Word and will, by which they are commanded to submit."

Third, "the benefit of this virtue being placed in a wife's heart is very great, and that both to her husband, and also to herself." (i) "To her husband, in that it will make her show her respect of him before others, behind his back, as well as before him in his presence, and also will make her faithful to him, and careful to do his will wherever he is, whether with her, or (away) from her." (ii) "To herself, in that it will minister inward sweet comfort to her, though her husband should take no notice of her submission, or misinterpret it, or require it for evil purposes; for she might say as Hezekiah did, 'Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight' (Isa.38:3)."

(5) Universally. "Let the wives be subject to their own husbands in everything" (Eph.5:24). "There is only one exception to be made in the submission of a wife to her husband, namely when he commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands" (Pink).²¹ A wife's submission is to be constant and collective. (a) She is to submit to his instruction. "Wives are to be obedient to the rebukes of their husbands, and teachable in the things wherein they are instructed. Job's wife, when he called her

¹⁵ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:160

¹⁶ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 223

¹⁷ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:163-164

¹⁸ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:161

¹⁹ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2: 163

²⁰ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:161-163

²¹ A.W. Pink, *Hebrews*, 1132

fool, did not open her mouth, and was silent" (Bayne).²² "The wife should be pliable and teachable (1Tim.1:11), yea, and be ready to seek instruction from her husband (1Cor.14:35)" (Boston).²³ (b) She is to submit to his commands. "She must submit to all his reasonable and religious restraints, not only from wicked haunts and customs, sinful fashions, and passions, but in case of inconvenience, dishonor, or just displeasure. For the church, for Christ's sake, sovereignty, and love, does deny herself, her own reason and wisdom, her natural wit and willfulness, her passions, pleasures, profits, ease, and liberty" (Bolton).²⁴

In a word, she ought, like a true looking-glass (mirror), faithfully to represent and return to her husband's heart, with a sweet and pleasing pliability, the exact lineaments and proportions of all his honest desires and demands, and that without discontent, thwarting, or sourness. For her subjection in this kind should be as to Christ, sincere, hearty, and free.²⁵

(c) She is to submit to his leadership. This is hinted at by the imagery of head and body. Just as the body ought never to act independent of the head, so wives ought never to act independent of their husbands. "Wives must be subject to their husbands in all things. Why? Because as wife, and in this relationship, you do not act independently of your husband. If you do, it is chaos" (Jones).²⁶

The wife is not to be entirely passive. It is a mis-interpretation of this picture to say that the wife should never speak, never give an opinion, but be mute or dumb and utterly passive. That is a pressing of an analogy and an illustration to a point at which it becomes meaningless. But what it means is this: the wife should never be guilty of independent action.²⁷

First, must a wife submit to her husband if he isn't a Christian or if she is his superior in grace and/or gift? "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives" (1Pet.3:1). The character of the husband does nothing to change the clear commands of God. "It will not be a sufficient excuse for her to say, 'He does not love me, therefore I will not obey him'; for not the husband's affection to her, but her affection to God, must be the great motive to subjection" (Swinnock).²⁸ "I do not deny that a wife may have more understanding than her husband, for some men are very ignorant and stupid; and on the other side, some women are well instructed, who by this have attained to a great measure of knowledge and discretion" (Gouge).²⁹

Second, must a wife submit to her husband without giving him counsel or correction? "Question: May she not reason with her husband about such matters as she thinks inappropriate, and labor to persuade her husband not to persist in the pressing of it, working to bring her husband to see the lack of wisdom (as she thinks) of that which she sees?" "Answer: With modesty, humility, and reverence, she may do so, and he ought to hear her, as the husband of the Shunammite did (2Ki.4:23-24), but, if despite all that she can say, he persists in his resolution, she must yield" (Gouge).³⁰

²² Paul Bayne, *Ephesians*, 337

²³ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:218

²⁴ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 278-279

²⁵ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 279

²⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, 123

²⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, 123-124

²⁸ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:509

²⁹ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:168

³⁰ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:169