

Must Wives Always Obey Their Husbands?

In this lesson we'll deal with only the last part of our text Scripture and the question: Must wives always obey their husbands?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34

“34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.”

For light on this verse, Paul sends us to the law, ***“.. as also saith the law.”*** The word "law," as used in the New Testament, refers to either: (a) the Ten Commandments, (b) the five books of Moses called the Pentateuch, or (c) the entire Old Testament.

Since there is nothing in the Ten Commandments about the rights of women, Paul must have been referring to the Pentateuch or the entire Old Testament. So why don't we see what the law says. (Sometimes we suppose we know what the law says, interpreting it in the light of our own thinking rather than in the light of what it actually says.)

Right in the beginning, in Genesis, we see that God made man and woman. Both men and women were to subdue and have dominion over everything on earth (**Genesis 1:26-28**). Wild beasts have the same instinctive fear of women they do of men.

Woman was not taken from Adam's feet, but from his side. She is not to be downtrodden, as in heathen fashion, but to stand at his side in Christian fashion (**Genesis 2:21,22**).

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone...” (**Gen. 2:18**). God knew it wasn't good for man to be without the help and inspiration of a woman. So, He made woman as a helpmeet; a helper worthy of him. Paul recognizes that interdependence in the following passage, which I want to quote from Weymouth's translation, because it makes it clear to our understanding:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:8,9,11,12 [WEYMOUTH]

***“8 Man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.
9 For man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for man's ...***

***11 Yet, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.
12 For just as woman originates from man, so also man has his birth through woman; but everything comes ultimately from God."***

In the Genesis account of creation, there is no sign of inequality between man and woman.

After the Fall of mankind, however, a curse was laid upon the wife. Isaac Leeser's translation from the original Hebrew makes it plain.

GENESIS 3:16 (LEESER)

"16 . . . I will greatly multiply thy pain and (the suffering of) thy conception; in pain shalt thou bring forth children: and for thy husband shall be thy desire, but he shall rule over thee."

This was both penalty and prophecy. And this curse fell upon Eve, not as a woman, but as a wife.

Women are not subordinate to men. It is a husband and-wife proposition. Wives do have a subordinate place in the family. They do not have a subordinate place in the Lord.

The Bible says, in **Gal. 3:28** ***"...there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."***

Women are called "sons of God" just as much as men are. John was writing to the entire Church — not just to the men — when he said in **1 John 3:2**, ***"Beloved, now are we the sons of God..."*** That verse continues, ***"...and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."***

The women will be like Him just as much as the men will be.

Old Testament Examples

Let's examine some of the husbands and wives as recorded in the law.

Peter cites Sarah as a model wife whose worthy example Christian wives could follow. ***"Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement"*** (**1 Peter 3:6**).

It is possible to lift this one verse out and say, "See, the wife is to obey her husband just as Sarah obeyed Abraham." But does it mean the wife doesn't have any right to speak her own mind? Some would leave the impression the wife never has a right to express her thoughts, that she's under the rule — the obedience — the domination — and is nothing much more than a slave. But that isn't what Peter is saying. Let's see what the law says:

GENESIS 16:5,6

"5 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee.

6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face."

Here we see Abram letting Sarai have her own way. He isn't dominating her like some warlord.

From the 16th chapter of Genesis through the 21st, there is an account of a disagreement. At its climax, we see that Abraham gave in to his wife's contention, and let her have her own way. And we see that God justified not him, ***but her***.

GENESIS 21:10-12

"10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

God told Abraham, one time at least, to listen to his wife. According to this, Sarah ruled her husband on this occasion. And God approved of it. As He always does when a wife is right.

God always approves of right. Some ministers, Full Gospel, Spirit filled, I'm ashamed to say, that the woman ought to do whatever her husband says, no matter what.

One preacher was told by a minister that if the husband tells his wife to sleep with another man, she ought to do it, because the Bible says for her to obey him.

That is an insult to our intelligence. God will never side in with wrong. And that would be violating one of His Ten Commandments.

One fellow told a man of God, "If a husband asks his wife to drink with him, she ought to drink with him. If he wants her to go to the bar, she should go."

Another man told him, "If an unsaved husband tells his wife not to go to church, she's not to go. If he tells her not to read the Bible, she's not to read it. She is to obey him to the letter."

(These things have been said to a preacher personally. You can understand that these opinions have created no little confusion.)

What do we say to these things? "Bologna and tommyrot!"

Peter gave Sarah as an example. Let's take it then. When Sarah was right, God sided in with her. God is not going to side in with the husband when the husband is wrong any more than He will side in with the wife when she is wrong.

Thank God for good wives! They don't need to be put down. Oh, I know there are some bossy wives, but if their husbands don't know how to take care of them, let them go ahead and be henpecked! You see, it is the husband's problem. There's no use in downgrading all wives because of a few exceptions. And it is the responsibility of the husbands to take care of that — not the responsibility of the preachers.

If a man wants to be henpecked, it's his business and no one else's. A man has no more business trying to manage another man's wife than he has managing some other fellow's money. We can lay down principles, of course. But I think there are some men who rather enjoy being henpecked.

A pastor once said, "I respect my wife, and I respect her opinion. Once she had to put her foot down and speak up to me." God had dealt with him about leaving the pastorate and going out in a field ministry. He had spoken to him about healing and had given him some instructions about ministering to the sick. It was the burden of his heart.

But he made a mistake. He went to the wrong meeting. (You can make a mistake sometimes going to the wrong church, the wrong convention, or the wrong meeting.) It was a midwinter prayer and Bible conference. Almost every person who preached spoke against healing meetings. And at the last, the man who stood at the head ventured to say that just one person shouldn't pray for the sick — just one individual shouldn't lay hands on them — everyone should pray and lay hands on them, and then when God healed them, He'd get all the glory.

Everything that the pastor heard downgraded him as a pastor. One can understand how women must feel at times — they've gone to church, been put down, and wished they hadn't gone. After two or three days of these meetings, the pastor went back home. His resignation had already been submitted, and his wife had been packing while he was away.

"Just unpack," her husband said, "We're not going."

"You're not?"

"No, I'm not. The church wants me to stay, and I'll stay. And another thing — from this moment on, I'm never going to pray for the sick again. I'll never lay hands on another person the longest day I live. If someone insists on being anointed with oil, I'll get the deacons to come and anoint him."

The pastor's wife could see that he was out of sorts. **"No!"** she said. "We're not going to stay with this church."

The pastor was taken aback. She'd never acted like that in her life. But she needed to act that way on this occasion, and God sided in with her.

"No — I'm not going to unpack," she said. "And yes — we are going to leave this church. And yes — you are going to obey God. That's what you're going to do!"

The pastor stood there speechless. She didn't ordinarily talk like that. But, to tell the truth about it, if she'd let him rule over the situation, they would have both been in a mess. She was right. And she put a little vigor into him, and he went ahead and obeyed God.

Back to Sarah: Sarah ruled over her husband in the situation we read about — and God approved of it. The pastor's wife ruled over him on this occasion — and God approved of it. God always sides in with right. He will never take the part of wrong. If He did, then He would be wrong.

Did you notice, too, that Sarah did not suffer in silence and servile subjection, but spoke her mind as she had a right to do **"as also saith the law."** It is recorded in the Pentateuch.

The **first chapter of First Samuel** records that when Hannah, the mother of Samuel, had a little difference with her husband, she spoke her mind and had her way. It proved out to be God's way.

Abigail was a wise woman whose husband was a fool. (There are some cases like that.) The Bible calls him a **"son of Belial."** By disobeying her husband, she saved a critical situation

and won the favor of David. If she'd listened to her husband, there would have been much bloodshed.

1 SAMUEL 25:32,33

"32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me:

33

And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."

Read the whole story from your Bible and notice that God is standing on the side with Abigail — even though she disobeyed her husband.

Obey in Everything?

It is not a sane argument that every wife must always obey her husband in everything. In our previous lesson we made reference to an incident when a man, a Bible teacher, came up to talk with a pastor after the pastor had said that the husband is not lord over his wife, and that Jesus is her spiritual head. He further said, "Turn to **Ephesians 5:24**." And then he read to the pastor, ***"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in EVERY THING."***

He emphasized as he read, ***"in every thing."***

"A wife," he said, "is to obey her husband in everything." That's when he said that even if the husband tells her to sleep with another man, she is to do it. He put heavy emphasis on the fact that it didn't specify the husband had to be a Christian husband; it just said the wife was to obey. "Even if her husband is unsaved, whatever he says to do, she must do."

He clung to that one verse to support his views. But the Word of God plainly tells us that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established (**Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Second Corinthians 13:1**). We must consider the teachings of the entire Bible. We're not to take an isolated text and build some doctrine on it.

We want to repeat: It is not a sane argument to say every wife must always obey her husband in everything. Some men are such brutes they would require things of their wives which should not be granted. If an enraged husband commanded his wife to kill their children, no sane person would say she should obey. Well, if she shouldn't obey that, there are a lot of other things she shouldn't obey — because they are wrong!

A HUSBAND CANNOT COUNTERMAND ANY OF THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS.

Smith Wigglesworth, a man mightily used of God said, "Under God, all I am in my entire ministry I owe to my dear wife." He went on to tell that when he was a plumber in England growing prosperous from plumbing the old mansions and houses there, he sometimes worked seven days a week. He said he grew cold in spirit, and really just became backslidden.

Now when you backslide and get out of fellowship with God, you're not so interested in the things of God. And when someone else is, it brings conviction on you.

"You go to church too much," he told his wife. "You're not to go any more. I know enough about the Bible to know the man is the head of the wife. You're to obey me. And I say, 'Don't go to church,' so you're not going."

She smiled sweetly and said, "Now, Smith, you're the head of this house, and you're my husband. Whatever you say in the house goes. And you know as well as I do, that I do not neglect you, the children, or the house in any way. But you are not my lord. Jesus is my Lord. And the Bible tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. The Bible tells me to go to church, and I'm going."

"Well," he related, "I'd fume and fuss and practically cuss. And finally, one day I told her, 'If you go tonight — I'll lock you out.' But she went right along — and I locked her out. She didn't have a key and couldn't get in. The next morning, I came downstairs, opened the back door, and there she was, all bundled up in her coat, leaning up against the door. She'd been there all night. When I opened the door, she almost fell into the kitchen. But she bounded up, smiled, and said, 'Well, dear, how are you this morning?'

"She was so kind and sweet, but I'd have felt better if she'd chewed on me a little. She didn't, though. She just asked, 'What would you like for breakfast?' And she fixed my favorite breakfast. " 'All right, all right,' I said, 'I'm wrong. I missed it.' She had just loved me back to God. But at the same time, she stood her ground. If she had quit church and followed me, we'd have both been in trouble."

We've seen that happen. Over the years we have heard women say, "My husband doesn't want me to come to church. He wants me to go here and do such-and-such. I thought maybe I might win him." And we have saw those women backslide right with their husbands. Some did get back into fellowship with God eventually, but I don't remember a one whose husband got saved.

One pastor said, "I remember many faithful women in those churches who had bullies for husbands who had forbidden them to come to church. One little woman in particular: What a time she had! But if you needed inspiration — if you were trying to preach and the service seemed dead — all you had to do was look at her, and she'd inspire you to preach. Her face was always lit up like a neon sign. One night the pastor's wife said to him, "Honey, did you notice Mary's feet?"

"No," he said, "I didn't. Was something wrong with them?"

"Well," she said, "she just had on galoshes." "Galoshes! It hasn't rained in a month. Why did she wear her galoshes?"

"Joe didn't want her to come to church. He was angry and hid her shoes."

He thought that if he hid her shoes she wouldn't go. But she put on her galoshes and came ahead. I'm certain that if he'd thrown away her galoshes, she'd have come barefoot.

She was a meek little woman, but that pastor recalls her telling him, "I don't want to dominate him in any way. He's my husband and I respect him. He's the father of my children and I teach them to respect him. But he's not taking the place he should take. He isn't interested in the things of God and won't come to church. It looks like I'm going to have to lead in these things. Am I wrong?"

"No," the pastor said, "you're not wrong. You're right."

She stood her ground. Afterwards she told the pastor how she'd said, "Joe, I'm not trying to take any authority away from you. But I'm going to keep these children in Sunday School and church. If they followed you, they'd be gambling and drinking. And another thing, we ought to pray at the table. We just sit down and start eating like a bunch of hogs. Before we eat, I'm going to pray."

She didn't ask him if she could — she said, "I'm going to do it." And the next meal, she did just that. One of the children peeked and told her, "Mama, Daddy just sat there and stared straight ahead like he was mad." But after a few times, he started bowing his head and closing his eyes along with them.

Then she told the pastor how a little later on she said to him, "Joe, we ought to read the Bible in this home, and it should be your place. But you're not doing it, so before we retire every night, I'm going to read a chapter and pray with the children. If you're here, you should have enough respect for me and the children to sit down and listen."

She said that sometimes he would listen. But at first, when she and the children got on their knees to pray, he'd just sit there. After a while, though, he would get off his chair and kneel, too. Thank God she made her stand! As far as that pastor knew, every one of her children was a Christian. And someone told the pastor later that old Joe got saved when he was nearly 60.

You never will make it compromising with the devil in any way! We need some balance in these things. A husband cannot countermand any of the Lord's commandments. He is not the lord over his wife's conscience; **the Lord Jesus Christ** is.

A wife must be true to her convictions even at the cost of losing her husband if he will not endure her true devotion to Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

“15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”

Submission

1 PETER 3:1-7 (WEYMOUTH)

“1 Married women, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands, so that even if some of them disbelieve the word, they may, apart from the word, be won over by the daily life of their wives,

2 after seeing your daily lives so chaste and reverent.

3 Yours ought not to be outward adornment of plaiting the hair, putting on jewels of gold, or wearing various dresses,

4 but an inward beauty of nature, the imperishable ornament of a gentle and peaceful spirit, which is indeed precious in the sight of God.

5 For this is how of old the holy women who set their hopes upon God used to adorn themselves, being sub missive to their husbands.

6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him master. And you have become Sarah's children if you do right and permit nothing whatever to terrify you.

7 Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with a clear recognition of the fact that they are weaker than you. Yet, since you are heirs with them of God's free gift of Life, treat them with honour; so that your prayers may be unrestrained.”

The New Testament Greek word translated into English as "submit," "subject," "submit yourselves" is hupotasso. It is used in **First Peter 3:1**, and elsewhere in regard to Christians submitting themselves to one another.

Paul uses it in **First Corinthians 16:16**, *"That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth."* And in **Ephesians** he used it, *"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord"* (**Eph. 5:21,22**).

What kind of subjection is meant? Paul certainly did not mean the brethren were to be slaves to each other, but that they should try to please one another as far as possible, thus avoiding disputes, contentions, and divisions. That's all he meant when he said, "Submit." You see, it is a subjection of love to the rule of love.