

Submission: One to Another

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Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21).

The “S” word (submission) is rarely the topic of positive discussion in *contemporary* Christianity. That’s because the concept of submission itself has become a repulsive one in our *modern* age; but submission and authority are central issues in the spiritual conflict of the ages!

Biblical submission often has the misconception of inferiority, weakness, inequality, slavery or oppression. However, submission primarily describes the way a relationship is ordered or conducted. Submission does not mean that one person is less important or inferior to another. It is very important that we have this clear understanding that submission is *NOT AN ISSUE OF superiority* but one of *function*. Submission is the God-ordained way whereby individuals properly and orderly channel all of their abilities, ideas, wisdom, talents and education.

WHAT IS SUBMISSION?

The Greek word for “submitting” here in Ephesians 5:21 is the Greek word *hupotasso*.¹ It is a compound word: *hupo* meaning “under” and *tasso* meaning to *set under*, or to *set in order*.

Noah Webster² defined the various “S” words as follows:

Submit: “To surrender, to yield one’s person to the power of another; to give up resistance.”

Submitting: “Referring to another for decision.”

Submission: “The act of yielding to the authority of another” (yielding is defined, “to give up the contest, not to oppose,” while contest is defined, “struggle for victory, superiority; to dispute; debate”).

1. *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #5293.

2. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828.

Submission then is the act of yielding to another; while yielding is an act of giving up the contest – not opposing. More than anything else, submission is a spirit conveyed; a humble attitude of the heart.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBMISSION AND OBEDIENCE

Submission describes the way that a relationship is ordered or *conducted* (attitude); while obedience on the other hand describes *compliance* to the particulars (actions). So, one deals with attitude, while the other deals with actions.

Watchman Nee points out a distinction between submission and obedience:

Submission is absolute, but obedience is relative. Submission is a matter of attitude, while obedience is a matter of conduct (*Spiritual Authority*, p. 107).

He goes on to say,

When delegated authority (men who represent God's authority) and direct authority (God Himself) are in conflict, one can render submission but not obedience to the delegated authority.

1. Obedience is related to conduct: it is relative. Submission is related to heart attitude: it is absolute.
2. God alone receives unqualified obedience without measure; any person lower than God can only receive qualified obedience.
3. Should the delegated authority issue an order clearly contradicting God's command, he will be given submission but not obedience. We should submit to the person who has received delegated authority from God, but we should disobey the order which offends God. (*Spiritual Authority*, pp. 108-110)

THE MANIFESTATION OF TRUE SUBMISSION

*And He [Jesus Christ] went down with them [Joseph and Mary], and came to Nazareth, and was **subject unto them** ... (Luke 2:51).*

This is the ultimate example of submission. The nature of true scriptural submission can clearly be seen here. The Lord Jesus Christ HIMSELF operated under submission.

Did this mean that He was *inferior* to Joseph and Mary? No!

Did this mean that they were *better* than He? No!

Therefore, biblical submission has *NOTHING* to do with inferiority and superiority, but with divinely established function!

SUBMISSION IS A PRODUCT OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Notice what comes before our passage in its context:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit ... Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:18, 21).

Submission then, according to our passage, is the expression of God's own nature and Spirit filling the believer. Submission is the very life of God living through the believer. It is the divine attitude, or spirit.

THE SPECIFICS OF SUBMISSION

This exhortation to submission is not just a general one. We are not simply to submit to *everyone*; this would be chaos – and dishonoring to God. Instead Paul says that we are to submit “*one to another.*” Then, so we would not miss the significance here, he goes on to detail, in very specific terms, exactly what “*one **to** another*” means.

The divine fullness of God's Spirit is manifested in submission in the following four specific areas:

Wives to Husbands

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife ... let the wives be [subject] to their own husbands in every thing (Ephesians 5:22-24).

Believers to Christ

Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Savior of the Body ... the Church is subject unto Christ (Ephesians 5:23-24).

Children to Parents

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (Ephesians 6:1-2).

Servants to Masters

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers;

but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men (Ephesians 6:5-7).

These four areas of submission³ make up the total scope of the Spirit-filled Life. Submission is the God-ordained means of channeling all abilities, ideas, wisdom, and talents for His praise and glory. It represents the very course of Divine Life.

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3. Along with their accompanying counterpoints of authority and responsibility (loving, cherishing, nurturing, forbearing, etc.).

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