

When it comes to the matter of a wife's submission to her husband, there are some today who are teaching **absolute and unconditional obedience**. That is, the wife should obey her husband always and in everything, no matter what he tells her to do. There is never a time when the believing wife should disobey her husband, even if that husband is an unbeliever. For example, if he tells his wife that she should not attend the morning worship service at the local Bible-believing church, she should obey him and fulfill her husband's wishes.

This position is clearly set forth in a book entitled, *Me? Obey Him?* by Elizabeth Rice Handford, the wife of Pastor Walter Handford and the daughter of Dr. John R. Rice. We shall now examine the teachings of this book in light of God's Word (page references are from the paperback edition of 1972 published by Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, Tenn.).

As Bible believers we heartily agree with Mrs. Handford's main thesis which is this: **It is through the submission and obedience of the believing wife that the unbelieving husband is won to the Lord**. Such is the teaching of 1 Peter 3:1, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [conduct] of the wives." The believing wife is not to preach the gospel incessantly to her unsaved husband. This is not the way to win him. In most cases he already knows what she believes and is familiar with God's plan of salvation. Thus the real need is not for her to preach the gospel but to *live the gospel*. It is by her submissive conduct that she is to win her husband. Obeying the practical principles of God's Word she is to be the best wife she can be to the glory of God. She is also to remember that she is a *believer first*. Her first responsibility is to honor God and be a "believing believer," and in so doing she can then be the wife that her God wants her to be. One's relationship to God must come first and foremost.

The serious problem with Mrs. Handford's teaching is that she says that the wife should obey her husband without exception and without qualification. Here is her statement: "it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification, to the openminded reader, that a woman ought to obey her husband" (p. 25).

To support this idea of unqualified obedience, the author quotes a series of Scripture verses relating to the submission of the wife (pages 23-24). Only one of these verses demands unconditional and absolute obedience. This verse is Ephesians 5:24, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, **so let the wives be to their own husbands IN EVERY THING**." The other verses cited merely say to obey and to submit, etc., which we would all recognize as Scriptural injunctions for the wife.

The Meaning of Ephesians 5:24 in Context

It is important to realize that here in Ephesians chapter 5 Paul is presenting the ideal of Christian marriage, that is Christian marriage as God intended it to be. He is writing to Christian wives and to Christian husbands. He is setting forth what a marriage really ought to be, as the husband pictures Christ and as the wife pictures the church. In this chapter he is not dealing with the problem of a believing wife who is married to an unbelieving husband (such as he deals with in 1 Peter 3:1).

We must remember that in Ephesians 5 Paul is presenting marriage as a picture. Marriage is a picture of the glorious and precious and intimate relationship between Christ and the church. The husband is to picture the Head of the Church, Christ Himself. He is to love the wife as Christ loved the church. The wife is to picture the church. Just as the church is to be subject (submissive,

obedient) to Christ, so the wife is to be subject to her husband.

So we must ask, how is the church to be subject to Christ? The answer is obvious: **IN EVERYTHING!** Christ demands nothing short of total and absolute and unconditional obedience to Himself. In fact, 1 Samuel chapter 15 teaches us (using the case of King Saul) that partial obedience is actually wicked disobedience in God's sight. So if the wife is to portray the correct picture, she must obey and submit to her husband **IN EVERYTHING**. The principle is this: ***total and absolute and unconditional obedience should be rendered unto our Lord.*** He demands nothing less than this.

In a Christian marriage made up of two believing partners (as set forth in Ephesians chapter 5) this should work in a wonderful way. Certainly a believing husband would not demand of his wife something that is contrary to the Word of God. Certainly if he loves her with the love that Christ had for the Church, then she ought to gladly submit to him in everything, even as we ought to gladly submit to our Lord in everything. If he loves his wife then he wants God's highest and best for his wife. How then could he command her to disobey God? How could he tell her not to read God's Word, not to assemble with God's people, etc.? If the believing husband is doing his part, then there is no reason why the wife should not be able to obey **IN EVERYTHING**.

The wife's total obedience ("in everything") is merely a picture of the believer's responsibility to be totally obedient to the Lord. The key point in Ephesians 5:24 is that **the Lord demands our total obedience**. The message the obedient wife is portraying is this: God demands absolute obedience. Thus, even from this we can conclude that if the wife is ever forced to make a choice between obeying God and obeying a lesser authority, she must obey God because **God demands absolute obedience**.

It should be mentioned that the Bible nowhere says that the wife is to obey her unsaved husband **IN EVERYTHING**. Yes, she is to submit. Yes, she is to obey. But the Bible never says that she is to obey **IN EVERYTHING**. Mrs. Handford errs in taking the "IN EVERYTHING" from Ephesians 5:24 and forcing it to apply to a situation where the husband is unsaved.

The Husband in the Place of God

Mrs. Handford on page 28 has made this statement: "She is to obey her husband as if he were God Himself." There is truth in this statement. In the family, God has set the husband over the wife as the Head (1 Cor. 11:3) and she is to obey him as unto the Lord. With respect to the relationship which marriage pictures, the husband stands in the place of Christ. To disobey the husband, in a very real sense, is to disobey Christ.

As we think about authorities that are over us, we must also consider civil or governmental authorities. Similar to Mrs. Handford's statement above, we should be able to say, "We are to obey rulers and governmental leaders as if they were God Himself." Support for this statement is found in Romans 13:1-4 where we learn that every authority over us derives his authority from God Himself. To disobey the authority is, in a very real sense, to disobey God. "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, **resisteth the ordinance of God:** and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans 13:2).

The question we must ask is this: Must we *always* obey the governmental authorities that are over us? What should we do when the government tells us to disobey God? If we find that it is sometimes right to disobey the government in order to obey God, then this would indicate that it is sometimes right for a Christian wife to disobey her husband in order to obey God. On the other

hand, if we find that we should render unconditional obedience to the government *in everything without exception*, then this would indicate that the same should hold true for husband/wife relationships.

The Example of Daniel

It is interesting that Mrs. Handford hardly mentions the case of Daniel, giving mention of this only in one very brief paragraph on page 26:

Daniel, long before he landed in the lions' den, had proved his value to the kings of Babylon. So had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, walking about in the flames of the fiery furnace.

Just prior to this paragraph she admits that "there are some examples in the Bible of a Christian's breaking a civil law in order to keep God's law." This statement seems to conflict with what the author says later in the book. Her point is that if the wife totally submits to her husband, then the husband will not command her to do something contrary to God's command, and furthermore, God would never permit two conflicting commands. Let's test this in the case of Daniel.

First, we must agree that Daniel submitted to Darius and to the government that was over him. As a believer he was a law abiding citizen. He certainly was not rebellious.

Second, we know that a conflicting situation did arise and God allowed this situation to arise. The decree said (in essence), "Don't pray to God." Daniel knew that His relationship to God must come first. Daniel knew that it would be disobedient not to pray. Daniel knew that even before being a citizen of Babylon, **he**

was a believer first! In this conflicting situation Daniel knew he had to make a choice: Should I obey man or God? He chose to obey the Higher Authority.

The question we must ask is this: If God sometimes allows a conflicting situation to arise with respect to governmental authority, will He not also allow, at times, a conflicting situation to arise with respect to the authority in the home?

Mrs. Handford holds that if the husband forces his wife to go against the will of God, then he is responsible before God, not the wife. What if Daniel took this same approach? Can you imagine Daniel responding in this way, "King Darius, though I realize that your decree forces me to compromise my relationship with God, I will nevertheless submit to you and obey you in this. However, you should realize, O King, that God is going to hold you accountable for this!"

It is true that Darius was accountable before God but it was also true that Daniel was accountable before God! Darius was wrong to issue such a decree and Daniel would have been wrong to obey such a decree. We should remember that even in his disobedience Daniel still submitted to the government's punishment that resulted. That is, he did not fight and resist when they threw him to the lions.

We must ask Mrs. Handford, "Why did God allow conflicting commands in the case of Daniel?" "Why did Daniel refuse to obey the decree of Darius?" Mrs. Handford does not address these questions in her book.

The case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would also illustrate the same principle (Daniel chapter 3).

The Example of the Wise Men

Believers are to obey those in authority over them. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors” (1 Peter 2:13-14). “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” Does this mean that the king should always be obeyed? Is there an example in the Bible of men disobeying a king in order to honor God?

King Herod gave strict orders to the wise men: “And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also” (Matthew 2:8). However, God gave orders that directly contradicted Herod’s mandate. God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. They obeyed God rather than Herod. They did the right thing.

The example of the wise men clearly contradicts the modern teaching (often heard from Bill Gothard and his disciples) that those in authority should be obeyed in all circumstances, no matter what.

The Example of the Early Christian Believers

On page 27 the author mentions Acts 4:19-20 and Acts 5:29. Her comment is as follows:

These two Scriptures have often been used as an excuse for civil or wifely disobedience. But to do so misses the whole point. The result of the testimony was: “They let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them.” Why? Because they had not broken any laws, civil or religious!

While it is true that they had not broken any laws, it is also true that they had disobeyed the religious authorities that were over them. In the paragraph immediately above Mrs. Handford admits, “Peter and John had been commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus.” The fact of the matter is that they disobeyed this command. They rebelled against this command because they feared God and they knew that they must submit to a higher authority and obey a higher command.

These Jewish men were in positions of authority (serving on the council or Sanhedrin), but God was the *HIGHER AUTHORITY*. The disciples knew that it was better in the sight of God to hearken unto God: “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). The key passage is Acts 5:28-29, “Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men.**” It is true that we should submit to and obey those whom God has put over us. It is true that we should obey rulers. It is true that wives should obey husbands and children should obey parents. However, if there is ever a conflict, then **we must obey God rather than man.** We must obey the higher authority, God Himself. Remember, we are **believers first**, and our first responsibility is always with respect to our relationship with God.

The early Christians did not submit to the Sanhedrin. They disobeyed their command to stop preaching the gospel. They continued to speak in the Name of Jesus. Submission in this case would have involved disobedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; etc.) and this they could not do. Our obedience to God must be absolute and total and

unconditional. How foolish it would be to tell someone, “You must always obey God except when the government tells you not to!” “You must always obey God except when your husband tells you not to!” This would be giving greater honor to lesser authorities. God is the sovereign Lord who is to be honored above all.

Peter and Paul lost their lives in Rome before Nero who at that time ruled the empire. Perhaps Nero or one of his subordinates said to them, “I command you to renounce Christ and confess that Caesar is Lord.” Should they obey this command in light of 1 Peter 2:13-14 (“**Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man** for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme, Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well”) or should they make an exception in this case and obey the KING OF KINGS? History demonstrates what choice they made.

Here is the principle: *We must always obey the authority that God has placed over us (whether it be parent, husband, ruler, etc.) with the exception being when that authority demands that we do something that is contrary to the revealed WILL of God, even the revealed WORD of God.*

Does God Demand Church Attendance?

Here is Mrs. Handford’s position: “It [Hebrews 10:25] does not say it is a sin if a woman is not in church Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night prayer service!” (p.35).

What does Hebrew 10:25 really say? “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but

exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Whenever the saints “assemble together” for the purpose of formal “exhorting” and teaching and prayer, the believer is not to forsake that. This would certainly include regular Sunday services and Prayer Meeting services as we know them today.

The word “assembling” in Hebrews 10:25 comes from the word “synagogue.” The synagogue in New Testament times was a place where the Jews would gather for a specific purpose: for the public reading of the Scriptures, for instruction in the Word of God, and for prayer. Paul says to Jewish believers, “Not forsaking the ‘synagoging’ of yourselves together.” When the local assembly of believers comes together for the specific purpose of reading the Scriptures, being instructed in the Word and prayer, then God’s people are not to forsake this.

God’s revealed will concerning faithfulness to the assembly is very clear:

THE COMMAND is found in Hebrews 10:25–“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

THE EXAMPLE is found in Acts 2:42--“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

THE REASON is found in Ephesians 4:12,13--“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Church attendance is optional in the minds of many twenty-first century Christians, but this kind of thinking did not come from the Word of God. What we think of the *CHURCH* is a reflection of what we think of *CHRIST*. Neglect of the assembly is neglect of Christ. Indifference to the assembly is indifference to Christ. Remember it is *HIS LOCAL CHURCH*, and we have been summoned to meet with Him. We are *BELIEVERS FIRST*, and the practice of believers is to regularly assemble together. Failure to assemble together and forsaking such is a serious matter before God.

Facing Reality

The position of Mrs. Handford in this book is identical to the position of her father, Dr. John R. Rice. He deals with this matter in his book *The Home*, chapter VII, “Wives BE SUBJECT to Husbands.” He makes this statement in light of Ephesians 5:24: “here the Scripture seems to take for granted that there will never be a case where God will call upon a wife to disobey her husband” (p. 106). He goes on to say that the husband is responsible for any sin he forces the wife to commit (p. 107).

As we pointed out before, Ephesians 5:24 pertains to a believing husband who is to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). A Spirit-filled husband will love His wife with Christ’s love and will never give her commands that will conflict with the revealed will of God.

Rice also says on page 110 that if a Christian woman truly loves and obeys her husband, then the husband would never command her to sin.

As believers we need to face reality and not live in a make-believe world. Mrs. Handford has been married to a fine Christian

pastor, but many believing women are married to unbelieving men who can be very unreasonable. There are times when unbelieving husbands ask their wives to lie and to cheat. There are times when church attendance is forbidden. God never promises that the submissive wife will never receive a conflicting command from her husband. God does promise that He will supply the wife with sufficient grace to honor and obey God even at times when this is very difficult.

John S. Feinberg relates the following real-life incident: “A true story is told of a Christian woman who loved her husband, but she agreed to have sex relations with another man. Her husband, an unbelieving businessman, perceived that if his attractive wife slept with one of his business clients, the client would renew a contract with the husband’s firm. So, the husband ordered his wife to commit adultery with the client. She obeyed because she believed it was her God-ordained duty to obey her husband. She had been attending some Bible study groups and had been taught that God’s pattern for the wife is to obey her husband, her authority figure, no matter what. She had also been told that if she obeyed her husband in these acts, she would not be guilty of sin; her husband would be. The only sin she could commit would be the sin of disobeying her husband. With that information in hand, she obeyed her husband and committed adultery” (*Fundamentalist Journal*, March 1983, p. 19).

May God save us from this kind of thinking! The end never justifies the means. It is never right to do wrong in order to do right. Obedience to one’s husband is a noble end, but it is never right to sin in order to obey him. The responsibility of this wife was to be a believer first, and as a believer she must obey her Lord. He is the supreme Authority and He demands and deserves absolute obedience.

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the unsaved

husband is with his wife in the family car and the wife is behind the steering wheel driving. The husband says, "I'm late for my appointment, please drive faster."

The wife responds, "I can't, dear, I'm already going the speed limit."

"I don't want to be late. I insist that you speed up." Soon the police pulls them over and begins writing up a ticket. Who should get the ticket?

Would the wife say, "Officer, that ticket belongs to my husband because he is the one who told me to speed and I was simply obeying him. He is to blame." No, the wife gets the ticket. She is the one who broke the law, and even though she did what she was told to do, she still was responsible. In this case she was clearly wrong to obey her husband and disobey the speed limit.

Suppose that an unsaved husband commands his wife to fly! That is, he tells her to start flapping her arms like a bird in order to fly. In a case like this, the wife has no choice but to disobey. Why? She cannot obey her husband in this case because she is under a higher law, the law of gravity. Her husband says, "FLY!" The law of gravity says, "DON'T FLY." She must obey the higher law. So likewise, there are times when the wife cannot obey her husband because she is under a higher law, the law of God. We must obey God rather than man, whenever there is a conflict. The wife must **NEVER** obey the husband if it means **DISOBEYING GOD**.

Let us never forget that Sapphira submitted to and followed her husband instead of doing right before God (Acts 5:1-11). It was a fatal mistake! She should have rebelled against her husband and done right before God. Mrs. Handford teaches that the wife should obey her husband in everything. God rebuked Sapphira because she did obey her husband and agreed with him in carrying out this wicked deception (Acts 5:9). Her submission to her husband was costly because God took her life!

Conclusion

We must agree with Mrs. Handford's central thesis. The believing wife is to submit to her unsaved husband (1 Peter 3:1), and seek to win him to Christ by her godly conduct. We strongly disagree with Mrs. Handford's insistence that this submission and obedience is to extend even to times when the husband asks the wife to do something that conflicts with the revealed will of God for her life.

To refute this view we considered: 1) The meaning of Ephesians 5:24 in its context. The context is referring to a believing husband and a believing wife who are both to be Spirit-filled. An unsaved husband who does not even have the Spirit of God is not being considered in this context; 2) The analogy of submission to civil authorities, especially in the case of Daniel, the early Christian disciples and the wise men; 3) The clear statement of Acts 5:29 which says "We ought to obey God rather than man." When confronted with genuine moral conflicts, God is the One who is to be obeyed.

A Word of Warning

Mrs. Handford's book is just one example of this kind of teaching which is very widespread in our day. For example, in a pamphlet published by the Baptist Children's Home (Valparaiso, IN) the author says, "Attend church only according to his [the husband's] wishes and permission....Let your husband's will become God's will for you."

The will of an unsaved, unregenerate, unreasonable, Spirit-lacking husband does not become God's will for the believing wife. God's will for the believing wife is revealed in His Word.

If an unsaved husband tells the wife to violate God's will and disobey God's Word, then this wicked violation does not become God's will for the believing wife. Let's use Biblical sense and common sense!

This kind of teaching has for many years been spread by Bill Gothard in his *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts* which is a seminar attended by many thousands each year. He teaches what he calls "Chain-of-Command." He teaches that if there is a conflict between the will of God and the wishes of parents, then the young person should obey the parents. For example, if a young man determines that it is God's will for him to go to Bible school but his parents want him to go to the university, then he should go to the university. If a young person determines that it is God's will to marry a certain woman and his parents wish him not to marry, then he should not marry. The whole philosophy behind this teaching is this: *REGARDLESS OF WHAT GOD'S WILL IS, THE PARENTS' WILL SHOULD BECOME GOD'S WILL FOR YOU*. This is dangerous teaching because it elevates the parents' authority above God's authority and it makes their will greater than God's will. It puts the parents above God.

In determining God's will concerning schooling or marriage or vocation, certainly the wishes of parents should be considered. There are times, however, when a believer, following God's Word and the Spirit of God's leading, will need to honor God, even if this means going in a direction that the parents may not understand, and may not even approve of. The difference can be carefully and prayerfully considered and the right course pursued.

The Lord Jesus, at age twelve, remained in Jerusalem and as a result caused misunderstanding and sorrow to His parents (Luke 2:41-48). His response was that He must be about His Father's business (Lk. 2:29). The business of His heavenly Father

was always His first priority, while at the same time He was subject to His parents (Lk. 2:51).

In Matthew 4:21-22 James and John responded to the call of Jesus by immediately leaving their boat and their father in order to follow the Lord. They did not say, "Lord, we would very much like to follow You, but first let us go and consult with our father Zebedee to see if this would be in accord with his wishes for our life." In view of this, consider the Lord's words in Luke 9:61-62. Such words run counter to the philosophy espoused by Bill Gothard. Remember what our Lord said, "He that loveth father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

May God help us to think correctly concerning these important issues. May we never forget that our first duty is to be a believing believer, exercising absolute and unconditional submission to our Lord Jesus Christ, honoring and obeying Him, our Highest Authority. Thus may we be "HOLDING THE **HEAD**" (compare Colossians 2:19).

FOR HUSBANDS ONLY!

The following was written in response to concerns expressed by a believing woman in New York State. She was familiar with several cases where husbands were demanding much of their wives and giving little in return. It is thus helpful to remind believing husbands of their responsibilities in light of God's Word.

This is a message for believing husbands only. Unsaved husbands have no desire to please the Lord and obey Him: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8). If you are an unsaved man, God's command to you is **NOT** "Love your wife, as Christ loved the church." You do not understand the meaning of Calvary love. You are presently rejecting God's only Saviour and your only remedy. You are dead in sins (Eph. 2:1-3) and perishing (1 Cor. 1:18). The only command that God has for you is this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23). If you are unsaved your first responsibility is to make sure that you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and have a relationship with Him that is real and right. Only then will you be able to correctly tackle your relationship with others including your wife.

What we wish to share now is meant for saved men who are married. Let's remind ourselves of some basics: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). One of the marks of a true believer is that he is a commandment keeper. A true believer desires to obey God and obey His Word. Do we obey perfectly? No. Do we obey always? No. Do we fail and falter and fall? Yes. But we do obey. And when we disobey we are grieved and we are miserable. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Thank God we have an Advocate with

the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One (1 John 2:1-2)!

As a saved man and as a husband, do you not desire to obey God? Has not God given to you, as a husband, very specific commands so that you can be the husband God would have you to be?

Look at the word "HUSBANDS" in Ephesians 5:25. Is not that God's message especially for you? Have you paid very close attention to it?

Do you tell your wife constantly how she ought to submit to you and obey you in everything and be in submission? Do you nag her about this frequently? It is true that God has a word for "WIVES" (Eph. 5:22,24), but does He not also have a word for HUSBANDS? If the wife is to obey God, is not the husband to obey God also? If the wife has specific duties before God, does not also the husband? If she is to obey Ephesians 5:22 as a believing woman, are not you to obey Ephesians 5:25 as a believing man? The wife's submission ought to be in response to the husband's love, just as the believer's submission to Christ is in response to His love as shown on Calvary.

Did you know that the wife is given three verses in Ephesians chapter 5 (verses 22-24) but the husband is given nine verses (verses 25-33)? Is it right for your wife to obey the three verses but for you to neglect the nine verses? Will this meet Christ's approval at His judgment seat? Instead of nagging your wife about her duties, why not be an example to your wife by fulfilling your duties? It is much easier to submit to a husband who is faithfully fulfilling His God-given responsibilities as the head of the home and the husband of his wife.

The husband's responsibilities as set forth in God's Word are very clear...

1) He is to love his wife, yea, to keep on loving her, even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). How did Christ love the Church? Did He not sacrifice and give His all for it? Do you exhibit self-denying, sacrificial love for your wife, seeking her highest and best regardless of personal cost?

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- 2) He is to take his proper place as her head, knowing that the Head of every man is Christ (1 Cor. 11:3).
- 3) He is to always love his wife as his own body, nourishing and cherishing her, even as Christ does the Church (Eph. 5:28-29). It says “nourishing her” not “nagging her.”
- 4) He is to always live with her according to knowledge, showing honor to her as unto the weaker vessel and also as a fellow-heir together with him of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).
- 5) He is to keep on rendering and giving back to her that which he owes her as his wife (1 Cor. 7:3, referring especially to sexual obligations).

As the godly husband fulfills his responsibilities, the godly wife will be encouraged to fulfill hers, which include the following:

- 1) She will submit to him, yea, to keep on submitting to him in everything, even as the Church is subject to Christ (Eph. 5:22-24).
- 2) She will love him (Tit. 2:4).
- 3) She will always reverence and respect him (Eph. 5:33).
- 4) She will be obedient to him even as Sarah was obedient to Abraham, calling him lord (1 Pet. 3:5-6).
- 5) She will keep on rendering and giving back to him that which she owes him as her husband (1 Cor. 7:3, referring especially to sexual obligations).

The marriage relationship is meant to be a beautiful picture of Christ’s relationship to His church, to His believers. The wife has an awesome responsibility because she is picturing the church (the believer) and how the believer is to be in submission to Christ. As someone looks at a godly wife, he (or she) ought to be able to say, “She is presenting to me a picture of how I ought to submit to my Lord Jesus Christ. As I watch her live with her husband I am learning how to be the believer God wants me to be.”

The husband’s responsibility is even greater because he is

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picturing Christ Himself. As someone looks at a believing husband, he (or she) ought to be able to say, “He is presenting to me a picture of how Christ loves the church. As I watch him live with his wife, I am learning about Calvary LOVE. I am learning how Christ GAVE HIMSELF for the church, how He sacrificed His all for our eternal welfare. As I see him nourish and cherish his wife I am learning about the Lord’s tender loving care towards me.” Men, are you presenting the right picture?

Let us not take our Lord’s commands lightly. God knows what makes a marriage work and we need to follow His Word and His perfect recipe. How can I expect my wife to obey God’s commands if I am going to ignore them? How can I expect my wife to submit and obey if I refuse to love and nourish and cherish?

Let us take a good look in the mirror of God’s Word (James 1:22-25) and see if there are areas where we need to change and correct our behavior. Let us be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Even if our wives are not faithful in doing their part, let us make sure that we are faithful in doing ours. May we love her and cherish her and nourish her, even if she fails to be as submissive as she ought. Often the believing wives are gracious and patient when it comes to the failures and shortcomings of their husbands. The husbands need to be gracious and patient when the wives fall short of being all that God would have them to be.

If we are really believers in Christ, let us act like it. Let us put off the old man and put away carnality and fleshly excuses, and let’s play the man! “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13).

From our heart may we echo these words: “I acknowledge that, of myself I am unable to fulfill these obligations towards my wife, but I trust, even as my Lord Jesus has commanded in His Word that husbands should do these things, that He will by His grace enable me to do them, and so to live lovingly and joyfully with my wife, until death parts us or until our Lord Jesus comes.” May it so be!