“Marriage has the unique power to show us the truth of who we really are. Marriage has the unique power to redeem our past and heal our self-image through love. Marriage has the unique power to show us the grace of what God did for us in Jesus Christ.” - Tim Keller, The Meaning of Marriage

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”

“When you walk into a room, figure out who’s in authority and get under their control.” - Joyce Meyer

From “The Beautiful Faith of Fearless Submission” by John Piper

What Biblical Submission IS NOT

Here are six things it is not based on 1 Peter 3:1-6.

1. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says. You can see that in verse one: she is a Christian and he is not. He has one set of ideas about ultimate reality. She has another. Peter calls her to be submissive while assuming she will not submit to his view of the most important thing in the world—God. So submission can’t mean submitting to agree with all her husband thinks.

2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar. It is not the inability or the unwillingness to think for yourself. Here is a woman who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. She thought about it. She assessed the truth claims of Jesus. She apprehended in her heart the beauty and worth of Christ and his work, and she chose him. Her husband heard it also. Otherwise, Peter probably wouldn’t say he “disobeyed the word.” He has heard the word, and he has thought about it. And he has not chosen Christ. She thought for herself and she acted. And Peter does not tell her to retreat from that commitment.

3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband. The whole point of this text is to tell a wife how to “win” her husband. Verse 1 says, “Be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.” If you didn’t care about the Bible you might say, “Submission has to mean taking a husband the way he is and not trying to change him.” But if you believe what the Bible says, you conclude that submission, paradoxically, is sometimes a strategy for changing him.
4. **Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.** The text clearly teaches that the wife is a follower of Jesus before and above being a follower of her husband. Submission to Jesus relativizes submission to husbands—and governments and employers and parents. When Sarah called Abraham “lord” in verse 6, it was *lord* with a lowercase *l*. Its like “sir” or “m’lord.” And the obedience she rendered is qualified obedience because her supreme allegiance is to the Lord with a capital *L*.

5. **Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength primarily through her husband.** A good husband should indeed strengthen and build up and sustain his wife. He should be a source of strength. But what this text shows is that when a husband’s spiritual leadership is lacking, a Christian wife is not bereft of strength. Submission does not mean she is dependent on him to supply her strength of faith and virtue and character. The text, in fact, assumes just the opposite. She is summoned to develop depth and strength and character not from her husband but for her husband. Verse five says that her hope is in God in the hope that her husband will join her there.

6. **Finally submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear.** Verse 6b says, “You are her [Sarah’s] children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.” In other words, submission is free, not coerced by fear. The Christian woman is a free woman. When she submits to her husband—whether he is a believer or unbeliever—she does it in freedom, not out of fear.

**What Biblical Submission IS**

If that’s what submission is not, then what is it? Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. It’s the disposition to follow a husband’s authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don’t flourish in the relationship when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works.”

But submission does not follow a husband into sin. What then does submission say in such a situation? It says, “It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. You know I can’t do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond joyfully to your lead; but I can’t follow you into sin, as much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage. Christ is my King.”
The reason I say that submission is a disposition and an inclination to follow a husband’s lead is because there will be times in a Christian marriage when the most submissive wife, with good reason, will hesitate at a husband’s decision. It may look unwise to her. Suppose its Noël and I. I am about to decide something for the family that looks foolish to her. At that moment, Noël could express her submission like this: “Johnny, I know you’ve thought a lot about this, and I love it when you take the initiative to plan for us and take the responsibility like this, but I really don’t have peace about this decision and I think we need to talk about it some more. Could we? Maybe tonight sometime?”

The reason that is a kind of biblical submission is 1) because husbands, unlike Christ, are fallible and ought to admit it; 2) because husbands ought to want their wives to be excited about the family decisions, since Christ wants the church to be excited about following his decisions and not just follow begrudgingly; 3) because the way Noël expressed her misgivings communicated clearly that she endorses my leadership and affirms me in my role as head; and 4) because she has made it clear to me from the beginning of our marriage that if, when we have done all the talking we should, we still disagree, she will defer to her husband’s decision.

The Goal: Everlasting Holy Joy

So I end with the reminder that marriage is not mainly about staying in love. It’s about covenant keeping. And the main reason it is about covenant keeping is that God designed the relationship between a husband and his wife to represent the relationship between Christ and the church. This is the deepest meaning of marriage. And that is why ultimately the roles of headship and submission are so important. If our marriages are going to tell the truth about Christ and his church, we cannot be indifferent to the meaning of headship and submission. And let it not go without saying that God’s purpose for the church—and for the Christian wife who represents it—is her everlasting holy joy. Christ died for them to bring that about.”

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Biblical submission is yielding to another's desires without resistance.

The difference between obedience and submission:

• Obedience is an external act of compliance, typically to “rules.”
• Obedience involves consequences; good or bad.
• Submission is a respectful attitude before, during and after all actions.
• Submission involves freedom of choice.
Covenant Relationship - an elected, as opposed to natural relationship of obligation under oath.

What if marriage is for the purpose of us personally …

- Becoming more like Jesus?
- Learning to love others unconditionally, like God loves us?
- Sharing in the suffering and the glory of Jesus?

What if we have missed the sole purpose for marriage altogether?

1 Peter 3:1-6 (NIV 1984) “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.”

1 Peter 2:21-25 (NIV 1984) “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

1 Peter 3:6 (AMP) “It was thus that Sarah obeyed Abraham [following his guidance and acknowledging his headship over her by] calling him lord (master, leader, authority). And you are now her true daughters if you do right and let nothing terrify you [not giving way to hysterical fears or letting anxieties unnerve you].”

Ephesians 5:21-23 (AMP) “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). Wives, be subject (be submissive and adapt yourselves) to your own husbands as [a service] to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, Himself the Savior of [His] body.”
Further Study

1. How did Jesus answer the disciples when they asked him what the greatest law or commandment was?
   Matthew 2:37, 22:37-39
   Mark 12:30, 31
   Luke 10:27
   I Corinthians 6:19, 20

   Have you surrendered your heart and life fully to Jesus? Do you allow Him to tell you how to live your life and respond in your relationships?

2. Marriage has a greater purpose than our happiness although God is not delighted in our unhappiness; He has much more to offer than temporary personal happiness. Read and meditate on the three purposes for marriage below, and the listed verses. Record your reflections.

   • My marriage is for the purpose of me becoming more like Jesus in behavior, attitude and speech.
     Romans 8:26-29; Philippians 2:3-9
   • My marriage is for the purpose of me learning how to love others unconditionally, as God loves me.
     Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 13:4-8; I John 4:8; Galatians 5:14
   • My marriage is for the purpose of me sharing in the suffering and the glory of Jesus. There is not one without the other.
     Romans 8:15-17; II Corinthians 4:6-18

Consider purchasing and reading Tim Keller’s book, The Meaning of Marriage

“...A man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery…” - Ephesians 5:31-32

Modern culture would have you believe that everyone has a soul-mate; that romance is the most important part of a successful marriage; that marriage does not mean ‘til death do us part, but merely for as long as my needs are being met; and that when serious differences arise, divorce is the best solution.

According to the bible, all of these modern-day assumptions miss what marriage is all about. In The Meaning of Marriage, Timothy Keller, along with Kathy, his wife of thirty-six years, draws a profound portrait of marriage from the pages of Scripture that neither idealizes nor rejects the institution but points us back to the relationship between God and man. The result is a vision for marriage that is refreshingly frank and unsentimental, yet hopeful and beautiful. This book is for anyone from singles, to couples considering marriage, to those who have been married recently or for a long time.
3. Read the meaning to both Greek words for submission and some of the verses with each of those words in them.

- Submission that is obedience is the Greek word *hupakouo* and it literally means, “to be under the hearing of one’s commands; to hearken to a command.” The subordinate is offered no alternative but to obey. Examples in the New Testament: Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20,22

- Submission that is an attitude is the Greek word *hupotasso* and it literally means to “place under in position, status or rank.” The subordinate consciously and freely gives their own will to the will of the one in authority. In the Strong’s Lexicon, it is explained as a “Greek military term meaning ‘to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader.’ In non-military use, it was ‘a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.” Examples in the New Testament: Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 2:13-18

4. Submission will require humility. Read and reflect on the following verses in that regard:

Isaiah 66:1,2  
Proverbs 11:2; 15:33; 18:12-13; 22:4;  
Matthew 11:29; 23:12  
Philippians 2:3-10  
I Peter 5:5, 6  
James 3:13-18; 4:1-6