

Submission to Husbands (And it's Limitations)

Court marshaled for *obeying* an order? Sounds highly unlikely considering it is well known one of the first and most important lessons a soldier learns in military training is to obey orders immediately, without question, whether he agrees or disagrees with the decision of a superior officer. Not surprisingly, a lot of people were quite stunned to hear that a young soldier was court marshaled for dereliction of duty after *obeying* a superior officer's order. The defense stated that he was merely obeying the order and was not aware of the consequences. Rather than dismissing the charge, the jury found him guilty in the first degree, and cited the fact that it was his responsibility and duty to know that the order was in violation of military law and then respectfully refuse the order.

This kind of conviction isn't a common occurrence—in fact it is quite rare. The core of military structure and training thoroughly conditions recruits and officers alike to respect the chain of command and obey orders from a superior authority without question. Every officer has another they are accountable to and must obey, from the lowest ranked all the way up to the commander in chief, who is the President of the United States of America...and even *he* is subordinate to a governing body of people. The military chain of command involves more than rank or seniority. Each member of the military receives a commission, meaning he is entrusted with both a duty and responsibility to exercise certain powers of authority that his rank entails. He is granted the power to command those ranked under his authority and the responsibility to obey those ranked higher in authority over him. He is never free to act independent of the highest authority.

In order for a chain of command to operate, higher authority must always supercede lower ranked authority. No commissioned officer, no matter how high in the chain of command, is given absolute, unlimited authority. And no commissioned soldier, no matter how low in the chain of command, is without some measure of authority. This ensures accountability and overall respect for the highest authority exercised by the commander in chief. Nevertheless, swift obedience is absolutely necessary in order for an army to function in unity and respond to an enemy threat quickly and decisively. Without it, soldiers' lives would be in grave danger and enemies would have a winning advantage over them. National security as well as the welfare of individual troops is dependant upon soldiers being thoroughly conditioned to respond in obedience to a legitimate command.

Military structure such as this is not a new concept. In New Testament times the Roman military's similar chain of command and delegation of authority was well known and understood by those living under its jurisdiction. So when Paul spoke of wives being commanded by God, (our supreme authority), to submit to their husbands, it was not surprising that he would use a military term to convey the meaning of the command. The Greek word, *hypotasso*, translated "submit," was well understood as a military word in much the same way our English term *court marshal* is associated with our military. The word means, literally, *to place oneself under*, as a soldier would submit or place himself under the authority of a higher-ranking officer.

To put it in military terminology, God, our commander in chief, has commissioned officers under Him (husbands) to exercise authority over those he has designated to be under leadership (wives). Commissioned officers have been granted the right to command those under their authority with the expectation that an order will be obeyed. God has also directly commanded those who are placed under designated authority to submit to, or obey those He has placed in authority over them. God clearly defines His chain of command, the nature of the authority He has granted and the limitations of that authority. Children are to be in subjection to parents. Wives are to be in subjection to husbands. Husbands are to be in subjection to Christ, Christ is in subjection to God, and all are under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

Jesus said of Himself, “**All** authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). God has absolute authority over all people, nations, and all of creation in Heaven and on earth. God’s authority is not limited in any way. It extends to making life and death decisions, taking vengeance when and how He deems appropriate, judging the motives of the heart, or building up and tearing down as He decides. In contrast, all authority that God commissions to others is limited and subject to His own authority. No parent has the authority to command his children to murder a neighbor. No government has the authority to command believers not to preach the Gospel. No pastor has the authority to command his congregation drink Kool-Aid laced with Cyanide. No husband has the authority to command his wife to rob a bank.

This arrangement doesn’t sound at all appealing to a woman who doesn’t understand or appreciate God’s system and doesn’t relish the idea of yielding so much control of her life to a husband. However, ask the same woman if she desires her husband be a good leader who willingly assumes responsibility for his family’s provision and protection and her eyes will very likely light up as she nods an affirmative yes. Sacrificial love and responsible leadership are very attractive qualities to have in a husband...but the expectation she *obey* a husband’s commands? Sounds pretty barbaric, even to a believer. Interestingly enough, however, a wife really can’t have one without the other. As a general rule, the less freedom a husband has to exercise the authority God has given to him as a husband, the less sense of responsibility he will have to protect and provide for a wife.

God designed His chain of command for the blessing and benefit of everyone. Women need to be shown that God’s arrangement is not only evidence of His goodness and loving provision, it is evidence of His wisdom in knowing what is in our best interest. An unbeliever cannot be expected to understand the many ramifications of this principle, but a believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables her to understand the scriptures when they are explained to her so she can learn why and how she is to submit to her husband, whether he is saved or lost. Let’s start where God begins with the subject of leadership, authority and submission.

Shortly after Adam was created and given the responsibility to care for the Garden of Eden, God gave him an explicit command. He told Adam not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He also told Adam what would happen if he disobeyed the command—he would die. Notice that Eve is not present when this conversation takes place. We know this because she hasn't been created as yet. (Check it out—Genesis 2:7-24) After God gave this instruction, He makes a statement that it isn't good for the man to be alone. He tells us that He is going to make Adam a helper that is suitable for him, and then makes out of Adam's rib a woman who is to be by his side (as was his rib) as his companion for life. Paul gives us further understanding regarding the creation of Eve in 1 Corinthians 11:9. He tells us, "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." Yikes! I have to admit; this can be hard to hear! But stay with me—it gets better. Really.

In the process of time—how much we are not told—Eve has a conversation with a serpent (Satan) who deceives her into believing God didn't really say what she thought He said and she wouldn't die if she ate the fruit. Perhaps because she wanted it so badly, she also let the serpent convince her that the fruit would make her wise if she ate it. And so she did. Notice that the Bible says she took of the fruit, ate it and gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate it as well. When God confronts both Adam and Eve later in the day He pronounces upon each of them the consequences of disregarding His authority and becoming their own authority.

God identifies Adam's sin when He said, "because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it..." In other words, the serpent didn't deceive Adam. He didn't give the fruit to his wife to eat, nor did he command Eve *not* to eat. He simply allowed his wife to have her own way, passively said nothing at all, and ate the fruit she gave him. He failed to exercise the leadership and authority that God had given him and failed to obey the authority God had placed over him. At that moment, his own, and Eve's happiness was more important to him than honoring God's commands.

Eve's sin was slightly different. Paul identifies it very plainly in a letter to Timothy in which he explained why women were not to be given equal authority with men in the government of the local churches and why they were not to act as pastors. He tells us, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence [subjection]. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (1 Timothy 2:12-14)

There are lots of theories as to why Eve was more easily deceived than Adam. The Bible really does not say conclusively what it was about Eve's nature that made her more susceptible to Satan's trickery. We just know that it was a danger with Eve and still is a danger in every woman born since. The point is--Eve failed to obey God's commands just as Adam did, but Eve usurped more than God's authority when she ate that fruit. The scriptures seem to indicate that Eve ignored Adam's authority as well as God's. Certainly she is aware of God's purpose in her creation, and by her words we are able to conclude that Adam had informed her the fruit was off limits. But it doesn't appear that

Adam *specifically* forbade her from eating after the serpent gave her (not Adam) his convincing speech. So...Eve knows what Adam has said, knows what God has said, but not understanding the command, reinterprets both of them and does what she wants

From that day in the garden until now, a husband's greatest weakness tends to be in the area of humbling himself in submission to God's authority and exercising leadership in his home. A wife's greatest weakness, on the other hand, tends to be in the area of humbling herself to submit to the wishes and commands of her husband. Both men and women reflect in these weaknesses a failure to recognize and execute their responsibility to fulfill their part in God's chain of command. Adam fails because of passivity, Eve because of self-will, and both because of pride. These weaknesses began a cycle of problems and heartache that continues in many marriages today, for we cannot defy God's right to govern our lives and give commands that demand our obedience without consequence.

Consider Sarah and Abraham's marriage... They have a problem. Sarah doesn't become pregnant and eventually becomes too old to bear children. She also has a solution. (Most women do.) She decides God isn't going to fulfill His promise by giving her a child so she commands Abraham to marry her servant Hagar so she can have the baby born to Abraham through her. I'm quite certain Sarah truly believed in her heart that it was the only way. But look how Abraham responds. "And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing; I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." (Genesis 16:2) Here we go again. The wife is deceived, comes up with a plan, tells her husband what she wants, and then he passively listens and gives it to her even though God has given him an explicit command that is completely different. Need we describe all the heartache that continues to this day because Abraham failed to exercise leadership and Sarah failed to yield herself to authority?

Let's look at this same problem again in a different situation. Jeremiah has just finished warning the men and women of Judah to repent of their idolatry and obey the Lord, otherwise, they would soon be destroyed and carried into captivity by another nation. The women (with men at their side) answered Jeremiah by saying, "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil....And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, **without our men**?" (Jeremiah 44:17,19)

Notice what is happening. It's not the men who are leading the worship to idols. They know it's wrong, but they are appeasing their wives and simply refusing to obey God and stop it. They are honoring their wives above God and failing to exercise their God-given authority or leadership of their homes. The women, meanwhile, have reasoned that God isn't going to keep His promises to care for them so they have "no other choice" but to

come up with a plan of their own. They even go so far as to tell Jeremiah they aren't doing this without the full knowledge of their husbands. They are admitting the men are not explicitly restraining them so therefore they must have their unspoken approval. Again, the men fail to obey what they know is right and fail to exercise leadership. The women fail to exercise restraint and yield to God's provision of authority. Predictably, disaster came upon them and they suffered sorrow and destruction.

And then there was Solomon—the wisest man who has ever lived other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows the Scriptures—kings were required to read the Law of Moses and the Law of Moses clearly states that the kings of Israel are not to multiply wives. For reasons we don't really know, Solomon ignores the commands of God and makes alliances with other nations by marrying the daughters of neighboring kings. Perhaps he thought he could control them all. Ah well...things didn't go as he had planned, and the women began to insist he let them worship their idols in their own ways. Solomon failed to exercise his authority, both as a king and as a husband. He was defeated, not by the nations he was protecting himself against, but from within by his own disobedience and the women he fell in love with. The women got their own way and predictably, influenced the heart of Solomon to the extent that he did not stop them nor forbid them from sinning against the Lord. And the ending to that story is no happier than the others who failed in the same ways.

In all of these cases, God's way was that the men exercise proper leadership and authority and command their wives not to sin. God's way was that the women exercise submission and obey their husbands, whether they understood God's commands and agreed with them or not. God's way is not cruel and heartless or demeaning to women. Rather, God's way protects both men and women from certain sorrow and destruction. Have you ever wondered why God told the mature Christian women to teach the young women to "be obedient to their own husbands, *that the word of God be not blasphemed.*"? (Tit 2:4-5)

Disaster always follows when women are disobedient to their husbands and rebel against the authority God has placed over them. When Christian homes become unhappy examples of turmoil and destruction, weaker believers and those who are unsaved look on and say, "See, God's Word doesn't work." On the other hand, when God's chain of command is honored and each member of the family humbly takes his place in God's order and fulfills the responsibilities God has assigned, the Christian family becomes an example of God's wonderful love and grace. It openly operates as a strong unit that is able to face the battles of life successfully. How differently things turn out when Christian families do things their own way and subsequently give unbelievers an excuse to mock the Word of God.

Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with each other before sin entered into the world. Before the serpent came on the scene, Adam was a loving and responsible husband and Eve was perfectly content to yield to Adam's leadership and be his exclusive companion and helper as God had intended. Sin changed everything. Suddenly a whole host of sins sprang up in their hearts. They tried to cover up their sin and hid in fear and guilt. Then

in pride, they self-righteously blamed something other than themselves for their failure when God confronted them. Adam blamed his wife and Eve blamed the devil. God, however, held both husband and wife responsible for their individual sin and failure. Adam was not excused one iota because Eve was deceived and Eve was not excused one iota because Adam didn't exercise leadership properly.

God told Eve as a result of her sin, "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Genesis 3:16b) The phrase, "thy desire shall be to thy husband" means that Eve would desire to rule over her husband rather than be in subjection to him. "He shall rule over thee," is God's pronouncement that her husband was to rule over her instead." Rather than harmony, this would cause painful conflict between them--*unless* Adam and Eve both humbled themselves and submitted to God's plan. And what is God's plan? It's summed up very nicely in Ephesians 5:33.

"Nevertheless let every one of you [husbands] in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband." When men love their wives with the kind of love God describes in 1 Corinthians 13, women have much less difficulty reverencing them. When women give their husbands the kind of respect that causes her to yield to his leadership, it's much less difficult for a husband to love her sacrificially. However, just like Adam and Eve were each held responsible to obey God's order, so husbands and wives today are held responsible for how they individually obey God, regardless of how well a spouse fulfills his part. The key to overcoming the lies of the devil and temptation to follow our own reasoning is found in James 4:7. "Submit [same military term] yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." We resist the devil by submitting to God's Word, and when we do this, God gives us the grace we need to obey Him, for He has said, "God resisteth [is opposed to] the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." (James 4:6) Apart from humility and obedience to God, men abuse and neglect their God given authority. Women, on the other hand, assert themselves and implement their own plans, blinded by their own errors. Obedience to God always requires us to reject our own reasoning and humble ourselves under the authority and mighty hand of God.

Now that we've established the basic structure of submission to husbands, let's address some of the misconceptions, problems and questions that are commonly related to it.

What should a wife do if she wants to submit to a husband's leadership and authority, but the husband does not want to submit to God's Word?

When a husband fails to exercise loving leadership and does not want to obey God's Word, a wife is still responsible to honor and obey him in everything. "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 [behavior] of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation *coupled* with fear." (1Pe 3:1-2) In 1 Corinthians 7:16 God reminds women (and men) who are married to unbelievers that that their willingness to live peaceably with such a spouse may be the very thing that one day causes them to come to Christ. Loving and obeying a spouse who is disobedient to God requires not

only meekness, (humility)--it also requires faith in God and a willingness to trust Him in such a difficult circumstance.

Women who live under the authority of a harsh and rebellious husband rather than one who is good and gentle, are to follow the pattern laid out in 1 Peter 2:17-23 that was followed by Christ who is our example. Ultimately Christ committed himself to God who judges righteously and refrained from reacting sinfully to the insensitivities and cruelties of others. While God does not promise that a wife's godly behavior will always result in the repentance of a mean spirited or unsaved man, He does indicate that this is the means that wins a rebellious husband to Christ. Furthermore, God does reward those who, because of their conscience desire to please Him, endure grief and suffer wrongfully. (1 Peter 2:19)

Living with a husband (or wife) who acts more like a self-serving enemy than a lover and true friend is an extremely difficult undertaking. It is not possible apart from the supernatural change that takes place through ones daily dependence on Christ and walk with the Lord. The fruit of God's Spirit enables a spouse to love though he or she is not loved and to be gentle, humble, and longsuffering in the face of difficulty or a spouse's self-willed behavior. It is only as a spouse gives himself to love and obey Christ that he will be able to exercise God's command to bless them that persecute and use others. God's method of encountering evil is always that we overcome evil with good and never attempt to avenge ourselves. Paul outlines this kind of response in Romans chapter 12. In short, we are to live peaceably with our spouse, even though he may not be very peaceable, to the degree it is possible for us to do so.

What should a wife do if she wants to submit to a husband's leadership and authority, but the husband explicitly commands her to disobey God or subjects her to harm?

These husbands want to exercise their authority apart from submission to God's authority. In doing this, they break the chain of command that God has established for their protection as well as their family's. This is a situation where, in military terms, they are guilty of dereliction of duty to obey a commanding officer or a law that has been put in place for the entire army to obey. Husbands are commissioned to exercise authority but they are also under a higher authority. While those who find themselves under the authority of a poor or very difficult officer must still obey him, it becomes the duty of a subservient soldier to respectfully appeal to, and disobey if necessary, an officer who explicitly commands him to violate the higher authority of the commander in chief.

In family terms, if a husband gives his wife an order that conflicts with that given by God, a wife is not to passively obey. By doing so she puts herself or other family members in jeopardy as a result. A wife is not released from the consequences of sinful decisions simply because it was the husband's wishes for her to condone sin or participate in it. Obedience to a husband's authority does not free one from a responsibility to obey God's authority any more than obedience to civil authority releases one from an obligation to obey God's commands.

The pattern for submission under God's chain of command is clearly outlined in scripture. In all but one of the following verses the word translated "submit" comes from the same military word used to describe the submission of wives. *All* believers are to submit to one another according to Ephesians 5:21 and 1 Peter 5:5. Employees are to submit to employers according to 1 Peter 2:18. Citizens are to submit to government authority according to Romans 13:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-15. Church members are to submit to those who have been given the oversight of the church according to Hebrews 13:17. Believers, (which includes those who are given the oversight of the church), are to submit to Christ according to Ephesians 5:24. And everyone is to submit to God according to numerous passages including James 4:7.

Our response when the command of one in authority over us clearly conflicts with the command of God is to obey the higher authority. This same principle applies to children who want to obey parents but are faced with a mother who commands one thing and a father who commands another. The child is obligated to obey the father over the mother unless the father's command conflicts with God's, in which case he is obligated to obey God. (For example, if a father commands a daughter engage in sex with him she is not obligated to obey.) A citizen is to obey a police officer unless the police officer attempts to exercise authority that he is not authorized to enforce. (For example, if a police officer demands he be allowed to search one's house without a search warrant one is not obligated to let him do so.) "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Ro 13:1)

There are numerous examples in scripture of believers who were faced with the problem of submission to conflicting commands. Peter and John were commanded not to preach the Gospel by those in governing positions. Their response was to respectfully disobey. They answered those in authority over 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... We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29) Paul, who wrote Romans 13, and all the faithful followers of Christ that followed him made the same decision. Some were miraculously delivered when God intervened on their behalf while others gladly laid down their lives in order to obey God rather than man.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faced with a command that conflicted with the command of God. They too respectfully disobeyed the king's order and committed themselves to God with a willingness to die, if necessary for their decision to obey God over man. They answered the king and said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful [anxious] to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." This resulted in the king becoming so furious with these humble believers that he ordered them thrown into a furnace made hotter than ever. To our delight, but the horror of an arrogant king, God protected them and delivered them.

Daniel was also confronted with human commands that violated the commands of God. On one occasion he, together with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were told to eat the food the king prepared for them so they would become physically strong. The food that was being offered violated the dietary laws that these Jewish men honored in obedience to God. Rather than simply refuse to eat the food, Daniel made an appeal to the king and proposed a solution. He asked that they be allowed to eat their choice of food for ten days during which time the others would eat the king's diet. After that time, they asked that their physical countenance be examined and compared to the others to determine which diet produced better results. Daniel had such a humble and gracious spirit that the king agreed and in the end, allowed the men to eat their own diet.

The next occasion in which Daniel was faced with a command that violated God's command wasn't quite so easy. Under pressure by men who were jealous of Daniel, King Darius unwittingly made a law that no one could pray for thirty days except to him. Daniel, in obedience to God, continued to kneel in his home three times a day and pray to God. This resulted in Daniel being subject to the penalty—being thrown into a den of hungry lions. Again, God miraculously intervened and preserved Daniel, delivering him alive and well the next day to a relieved king.

When a person under authority is asked to violate the authority of God, he is not given freedom to refuse in a defiant or disrespectful manner. He is first to appeal to the authority in an attempt to propose a different solution, clearly explaining why the request is in violation of God's authority. If this does not result in a change of heart, the believer is then responsible to disobey the command with a willingness to commit himself to the care of God and others in authority over him. If he is in danger, he is permitted to escape and protect himself just as Paul escaped from a city by being let down in a basket over the wall. But if he is unable to escape, such a believer is willing to endure whatever consequences occur as a result.

The Bible teaches wives to “submit yourselves unto your own husbands [not someone else's husband, and not a boyfriend], as it is fit in the Lord.” (Col 3:18) It is fit in the Lord for wives to obey their husbands in the order of authority that God has ordained. This is outlined in Ephesians 5:22-24 where we are told that the church submits to Christ and Christ submits to God. No believer is to submit to a church that commands him to disobey Christ, yet all believers are to be subject to the leadership of the church and the church is to obey Christ in everything. Wives, likewise, are not to submit to sinful commands of a husband, but at the same time, are to submit themselves to their husbands in everything in the same way the church is to submit itself to Christ in everything. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing.”

Are husbands allowed by God to force a wife to obey?

In a military setting, soldiers are to obey the orders of a higher ranked officer without question. Disobedience subjects one to a higher authority who is given the power to judge and execute punishment for the offence. The relationship between the lower ranked soldier and the higher ranked soldier is limited to one of obligatory obedience. Love for the authority is not a consideration. Unlike in a military setting, a husband is commanded to love his wife and is never commanded by God nor permitted by God to force a wife to obey him. Obedience is a choice a wife makes out of her love and respect for both God and her husband. It is to be a function of her will just as God allows us to freely choose to obey Him out of our love and respect for Him.

When a husband or wife refuses to obey the authority God places over them, they are essentially acting in unbelief and disobeying God Himself, not the human to whom the authority has been delegated. Therefore, it is God's responsibility and prerogative alone to judge and deal with the disobedience in the way He chooses.

Is a wife obligated to submit to a husband's wishes with regard to such things as sexual issues?

The Bible clearly commands wives to allow their husbands to exercise leadership in every area of family life and to obey them, which does include matters involving each other's bodies. There are, however some interesting perimeters that God has laid out for sexual relations. Again, remember that the relationship between a husband and wife is much more complex than a mere relationship between a subject and a sovereign. A believing husband and wife are also brother and sister in Christ, members of the same church body, co laborers with Christ, and the closest of friends. The way a husband is to treat a wife, and wife is to treat a husband, is not exempt from the commands God gives to all us regarding the way we are to treat one another. We are commanded to defer to one another according to Philippians 2:3, please one another according to Romans 15:2, overlook the mistakes of one another according to Proverbs 17:9, forgive one another according to Matthew 6:14-15, confront one another when one is sinning according to Matthew 18, exercise mercy with one another according to Luke 6:36, be careful not to violate the conscience of another according to Romans 14:21, restore one another when the other is in error according to Galatians 6:1, and serve one another according to Galatians 5:13.

This said, it is much easier to understand the way both husband and wife are to approach their sexual relationship with one another. There are additional principles that bear on this subject exclusively. One is that a sexual relationship between a husband and wife is ordained by God and blessed by God as something pure and precious. It is an exclusive relationship to be guarded and exchanged between a husband and wife alone. Sexual relations within marriage are to be ongoing, or regular. How regular depends on the individual needs of a husband and wife. And finally, the sexual relationship is the *only* area in which God gives *equal* authority to both a husband and a wife over the body of the other. In 1 Corinthians 7:4 we read, "The wife hath not power [authority] of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power [authority] of his

own body, but the wife.” Furthermore, God commands wives to refrain from defrauding, or withholding from their husbands sexual fulfillment, and at the same time commands husbands not to defraud, or withhold from their wives sexual fulfillment that they desire. We are told very plainly what the consequences of disregarding this instruction are. A husband or a wife leaves his or her spouse vulnerable to sexual temptations that Satan will doubtless attempt to use in an effort to destroy the marriage relationship. (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Are women of less value, or worth, to God than men?

God’s chain of command in no way implies that women are of less value to Him than men. The scriptures teach just the opposite. In Christ, there is no difference between men and women. What *is* different is the role God gave to each and the amount of authority that God has delegated to men and to women. In Micah 6:4, God said to Israel, "I brought thee up out of Egypt and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, **and Miriam.**" God tells us it was *He* who sent Moses and Aaron. Yet notice He also indicates He sent *Miriam* as well! We know God did not give Miriam equal authority with Moses--nor was she given the responsibility to rule or preach to Israel. What then, was her function? Personally, I believe God gave Miriam for the purpose of teaching, counseling, and leading the women to practice godly principles of womanhood as well as to teach the women to observe the very intimate details of the ceremonial laws pertaining to women.

Miriam, quite possibly the world’s first ERA activist, made a grave mistake in assuming God gave her equal authority with Moses. She was not content to function within the limitations and in the capacity that God had given to her, *under* the higher-ranking authority of Moses. She *did* have a measure of God given authority, but she erred in wanting *equal* authority as that given to Moses. She seems to have succeeded in convincing Aaron to join her cause and like so many men, he listened and went along with her. Together they confronted Moses and made the statement, “Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?” (Numbers 12:2) To their surprise, God immediately intervened and asks a question of His own. He says, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Numbers 12:8)

Wanting equal authority is a mark of arrogance. It demonstrates a lack of fear, or respect, for the Lord’s authority and seeks to establish one’s own authority in its place. Quite appropriately God afflicted Miriam with leprosy and only healed her in answer to Moses’ prayer and a period of time spent outside the camp in utter humility. It’s a serious thing to challenge God’s decisions. Although God did heal her, Miriam’s ministry seems forever marred thereafter. God does raise up women to be co laborers together with men. Both Priscilla and Aquilla were used by God to help Apollos. Deborah was used in the life of Barak and called a mother to Israel. God used the ministry of Anna, who prophesied the birth of Jesus, the ministry of Lydia, who gathered women together to pray, the ministry

of Dorcus, who compassionately met the needs of poor widows, and the ministries of countless other women who have had a heart for the Lord and burden for others. In Heaven, their success and failure is not measured by their popularity or the size of their ministries--but by their obedience or disobedience to teach what God instructed them to teach, and help those God instructed them to help.

Are women forbidden to give their opinion to men in authority over them?

Nowhere in all the scriptures are women commanded to refrain from giving their opinion to their husbands. The idea that wives are not to express an opinion unless they are asked by their husband to do so is, thankfully, not taught in the Bible. That would certainly make for some pretty boring dinner conversation. The fact that wives are always to reverence their husbands does require opinions to be given in an attitude of respect, however. Then too, every Christian's speech is to be governed by other biblical principles that apply equally to all believers. Our words are always to be gracious, kind, appropriate and wise. Whining and complaining, bitterness and anger are all forbidden by God and are a mark of spiritual immaturity. Neither husband nor wife is to engage in such destructive language. Women are not expected to cower in slavish silence any more than men are given license to rant and rave like Atilla the Hun.

God does give us guidelines for the way women are to conduct themselves in a public church service. In 1 Timothy 2:11-12 Paul addressed Christians who were living in the Roman world where women occupied a dominant position in the often sexually immoral and lascivious worship of idols. Women "priestesses" were a culturally acceptable practice in heathen worship. They used sexual behavior to dominate men and control the service. The Christian assembly, in contrast, was to be a holy and orderly assembly. Women were not to dominate, interrupt the service, or exercise leadership authority that God delegates to men. Rather, they were to come to church to quietly listen and learn, just like everyone else under the preaching of God's Word. Paul was not forbidding women to take any part in a church service and certainly was not suggesting women never do anything but listen attentively to their husbands.

Since New Testament times, women have traditionally been included in the local church assembly rather than sitting on the sidelines as was the practice in Jewish assemblies. Women might participate by giving a personal testimony, praying together with the men (note the women gathering to pray together with the men in the upper room on the day of Pentecost), teaching women and children, using their talent to sing, or interacting with men and women in many types of mutual efforts to further the Gospel. In studying the activity of the New Testament local church we find women engaging in every aspect of the work other than governing and preaching. No matter what service a woman engages in through her local church, it needs to always be done in an attitude of respect and humble submission to appointed authority. When women refuse to be a dominate presence in the local church, men are encouraged to assume proper biblical leadership and exercise their gifts of discernment that are given to them by God for this purpose.

As we stated earlier, the way a husband is to treat a wife, and wife is to treat a husband, is not exempt from the commands that God gives to all us who are called by Christ's name.

This includes the command that we confront one another when one is sinning according to Matthew 18, and forgive as Christ forgives us. In Ephesians we learn that believers greatly assist one another in their spiritual growth when we are willing to speak the truth to one another in the spirit of love. (Ephesians 4:15) Husbands and wives who share the kind of love, friendship and care for one another that we see described in the Bible enjoy an intimacy and relationship that only grows stronger with each passing year. It is the kind of relationship in which one wouldn't think of passively ignoring a sin that was threatening to destroy one's beloved companion. Rather, a truly loving spouse risks his or her own comfort to plead for repentance toward God with the same devotion a mother fearlessly jumps into a raging river to save her baby.

Consider the tragedy that occurred in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. The two of them agreed to lie to the apostles and other believers and tell them they were giving all the money they made on the sale of some land. The idea was to appear completely self-sacrificial without actually donating all of the money. Secretly they set aside some of the profit for themselves. It wasn't their decision to hold back part of the profit that got them into trouble. The problem was that they hypocritically wanted others to believe they were giving it all when they were not. When Ananias shows up to give the gift, Peter questions him, and when he lies, God strikes him dead immediately. Three hours later Sapphira shows up, not knowing what had happened to her husband, and Peter questions her about the donation as well. When she covers up for her husband and lies, God strikes her dead.

Notice that God holds Sapphira responsible for going along with her husband's sinful leadership decision. The Bible says, "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And kept back [meaning Ananias] part of the price, his wife also being privy to it..." (Acts 5:1) Wow, what a price to pay for passively going along with a sinning husband and making no effort to persuade him to do what was right. God certainly didn't commend her or excuse her because the decision was her husband's idea or because she was under the authority of her husband. I suspect Sapphira wishes she had loved her husband enough to tell him her opinion, or feared God enough to warn him that his idea was sinful and dishonest. Instead of covering up for him, I suspect she wishes she had been truthful with Peter. How much differently this story might have turned out had either Ananias or Sapphira challenged the other concerning the sinfulness of their plot.

Is there a difference between man's authority and God's authority where wives are concerned?

The fact that authority is ordained by God, and is necessary, isn't in question by genuine believers. The very act of responding to the Gospel involves recognition of and submission to God's absolute authority. Believers are referred to as those who have obeyed the gospel while unbelievers are referred to as those who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:16). Because God has absolute authority to do so, "He commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Believers have some measure of understanding regarding God's authority and are usually aware that a God-ordained authority has the right to give commands and expect obedience. This is evident by God's command that children obey their parents, wives obey their husbands, employees obey their employer, citizens obey their government, and congregations obey their pastor and church leaders. Though believers may find it difficult or unpleasant to do so, they generally recognize their responsibility to respect and obey legitimate authority.

The point at which authority issues so often become problematic for Christians is when they are faced with questions regarding the differences between God's authority and man's authority and the defined parameters for the proper exercise of God-given authority. Many Christians do not fully understand the serious nature of God's command to exercise legitimate authority and submit to legitimate authority; nor do they often understand how to recognize and respond to illegitimate authority.

Obedience to authority is one of the highest marks of Christian maturity. Yet at the same time, obedience to wrong authority is one of the highest marks of Christian *immaturity*. We want our children to obey their teacher, but we do not want our children to obey a child molester. Children need to be taught to obey their teacher, yet at the same time, they also need to become aware that a teacher's authority does not require them to submit to molestation. In a similar way, Christians must learn the importance of submitting to rightful authority, but also must learn how to handle authority when it clearly violates the limits God has set. Furthermore, Christians who are given authority must understand the responsibilities of that obligation, the proper use of such power, and the consequences of misusing authority that is given by God.

God's authority is:

- **Absolute** – God possesses all authority over everything. He has the authority to save and to condemn. (*Matthew 7:21*). He has the authority to interpret and write the Scriptures (*Matthew 23:27-28,38-29*). Jesus never said, "Thus saith the Lord" because He *was* Lord. He simply said, "Verily I say unto you..." Jesus exercised authority over nature (*Luke 8:24*), over diseases and infirmities, over demons and the power of Satan (*Luke 4:33-36*), over man (*Matthew 10:32*), and over sin. He possesses authority to forgive sin (*Mark 2:10*) and to exercise mercy.

Isaiah 45:7—I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear [confess].

- **Unlimited** - Jesus said of Himself, "**All** authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (*Matthew 28:18*). God's authority is not limited in any way. It extends to making life and death decisions, taking vengeance when and

how He deems appropriate, judging the motives of the heart, building up and tearing down as He decides.

1 Samuel 2:6-8—“The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s and he hath set the world upon them.

Psalm 75:6-7—Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another

Psalm 33:11—The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

- **Unquestioned**

Romans 9:20-21—Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Job 9:12—Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?

Daniel 4:36—All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?”

- **Perfect, just and righteous**

Psalm 67:4— O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.

Psalm 47:7—God reigneth over the heathen; God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

Psalm 18:30—As for God, his way is perfect.

Psalm 33:4—The word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment.

Psalm 145:17—The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Psalm 33:11—The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Revelation 15:4—Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy.

- **Self-Existent**

John 19:11—Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.

Daniel 4:3,17,25,37—His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation. The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will and setteth up over it the basest of men. Thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field...till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kindom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Man's authority is:

- **Delegated**

Matthew 10:1—And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

John 19:10-11—Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Romans 13:1—Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Corinthians 13:10—Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

Genesis 45:8—So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

- **Temporary**

Romans 7:2—For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband.

Genesis 2:24—Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Matthew 10:1— And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

- **Limited**

Leviticus 25:43—Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.

Daniel 4:31—While the word *was* in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

Romans 13:1-5—Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

1 Corinthians 7:4—The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

2 Corinthians 10:8— For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

1 Timothy 2:12—But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

- **Imperfect**

Esther 3:1—After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that *were* with him.

Daniel 4:31—While the word *was* in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

Proverbs 29:2—When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

- **Subject to a higher authority**

John 19:10-11—Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Acts 15:2—When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Colossians 1:16—For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Colossians 2:10—And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

2 Samuel 23:3—The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men *must be* just, ruling in the fear of God.

- **Subject to scrutiny**

2 Corinthians 10:8—For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

Deuteronomy 1:15—So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.

2 John 1:10—If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed:

2 Samuel 23:3—The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men *must be* just, ruling in the fear of God.

3 John 1:11—Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

1 Corinthians 14:29—Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

Resistance to illegitimate authority

- For right reason – Obedience requires one to violate God's commands; obedience violates God's limitations placed on authority
- In the right way – With humility, deference for authority, respect, after a godly appeal

- With the right motive – God’s honor, righteousness, a clear conscience, submission to God

Examples of wrong resistance toward God appointed authority:

- Korah – Rebels against Moses – *Numbers 16*
- Aaron and Miriam – Rebels against Moses – *Numbers 12*
- Saul – Rebels against Samuel’s delegated authority – *1 Samuel 15*
- Unfaithful steward – Against command of employer – *Matthew 25:14-30*

Examples of righteous resistance toward God appointed authority:

- Peter, Paul—Preaching against command of governor—*Acts 5:28-33*
- Midwives in Israel—Refusing to kill boy babies at Pharaoh’s command—*Exodus 1:17*
- Daniel—Not wanting to eat the king’s diet—*Daniel 1*
- Daniel—Defying order of king not to pray—*Daniel 6*
- Shadrach, Meshack, Abednigo—Refusing to bow to idol as commanded by king—*Daniel 19*
- Jonathan—Protecting David against father’s command—*1 Samuel 20*

God Commands ALL Christians to submit to authority

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you e subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. *1 Peter 5:5*

- Citizens to governing bodies – *Romans 13:1-7*
- Church members to pastor and leadership – *Hebrews 13:17*
- Wives to husbands – *Titus 2:5; Ephesians. 5:22*
- Children to parents – *Ephesians. 6:1; Colossians. 3:20*
- Employees to Employers – *1 Peter 2:18; Ephesians. 6:5*

Note: These are imperative commands to obey, even when demands are unreasonable, disagreeable – *1 Peter 2:18-23*

God commands all who are in authority to exercise authority lawfully and properly

- Governing bodies – *2 Samuel 23:3*
- Fathers – *Ephesians 6:4*
- Mothers – *Proverbs. 29:15; Proverbs 13:24*
- Church leaders and pastors – *1 Corinthians 9:18; 1 Peter 5:2-3*
- Employers – *Leviticus 25:43; Deuteronomy. 24:14; Colossians 4:1*

Godly leadership is to be exercised in an attitude of service and humility, providing an example though very fallible and imperfect

- Humility and service—*Luke 22:25-26; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 5:5-6*

- Example—*1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; 1 Corinthians. 8:9*

Note: Leaders are to give followers freedom to disagree on non-essentials—*Acts 15:1-21; Romans 14:4*

Spiritual authority begins and ends between the pages of the Bible

Biblical Limitations of Leadership

- The longing for leadership must not turn into a passive desire to turn one's will over to someone else or lean on someone other than God to guide or take responsibility for choices each individual must make for him or herself.
- The fear of leadership must not turn into a refusal to submit to leadership that is established by God for our good.
- The tendency in each of us to manifest pride by acts of self preservation, self exaltation, and self centeredness in interpersonal relationships must be countered by God's command to humble ourselves, yield personal rights, serve others, and esteem others higher than ourselves. The tendency for dominating individuals (which includes all of us at times) to want a piece of God's glory and the worship which belongs to God alone must be recognized and replaced by worship, adoration, and obedience to God.
- Those who allow others to control them in areas God never intended make *people* their God and idols. Those who attempt to control others in ways God never intended for them make *themselves* their God and idol.

Note the following ways that Diotrephes abused his authority and ultimately disqualified himself as a leader. 3 John

1. Desired preeminence, dominance, and control. Manifested a bondage to the sin of lording it over others.
2. Was dissatisfied with the authority he did have.
3. Did not recognize or respect authority established by God; rebelled against it.
4. Would not admit fault; did not want to risk losing control of people by doing so.
5. Used slander and dishonesty (distortion, exaggeration, lies, and inferences) to discredit others in order to keep authority and maintain adoration.
6. Intolerant toward others.
7. Insisted others agree with him, submit to his perception, or suffer for refusing to do so.
8. Not content
9. Assumed authority over people and things not given to him by God.

10. Manifested punitive or vindictive behavior with words or actions.
11. Abused church ordinances for own agenda
12. Inordinate desire to influence the thoughts and scruples of others, which Scriptures do not allow.
13. Presumed to have the authority he told others he had when he did not obtain such authority from God.