

**WHAT DOES
"SUBMIT IN EVERYTHING"
REALLY MEAN?
THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF
MARITAL SUBMISSION**

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*I. INTRODUCTION:
WHY ANOTHER PAPER ON MARITAL SUBMISSION?¹*

For several decades evangelicals have wrestled with the issue of gender roles, including marital submission. Thus, the question arises: Do we really need another article on marital submission? An evaluation of the current evangelical literature in fact reveals that very much and very little has been written. In terms of sheer volume, hundreds of books and numerous ministries address the subject of marital submission; in that way much has been written.² But a closer inspection of the literature and a careful assessment of contemporary culture reveal that very little has been written which addresses the parameters of marital submission in terms of the specific issues that are increasingly confronting Christian women. Some would even argue that the very question, "What are the limits of marital submission?" reveals an unbiblical capitulation to

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¹My focus in this paper will be to analyze various models of marital submission, not to defend the concept of marital submission itself. It is beyond the scope of this paper to respond to egalitarian arguments, but I would simply note that I believe a detailed study of the Greek words for head (κεφαλή) and submission (ὑποτάσσω) used in the NT marriage texts reveal that the husband does have some unique authority. The question here is what is the nature and extent of that authority.

²For instance, a search on the Council for Biblical Equality (CBE) website (www.cbeinternational.org) gets 2077 hits on the subject of marriage, and 320 hits on submission. A search of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) website (www.cbmw.org) gets 211 hits on marriage and 156 hits on submission. Both of these organizations promote dozens of recently published books that deal with gender roles in marriage and marital submission.

modernity. Stephen Clark, in what for many years was virtually the handbook for traditional gender role theology, makes such an assertion. He argues that modern secular society asks such questions merely to control “the scope of someone’s authority” whereas the biblical writers place virtually no limits on submission and authority. Hence, “the whole of the woman’s life (everything she does) has to be subordinate to her husband.”³ Other evangelical writers who also place great emphasis on marital submission (even asserting that it is essential to a Christian worldview⁴) concede that there may be some occasions when submission must be qualified, but argue that this is so rare that it need not be developed or apparently considered. For instance, Mary Kassian argues:

Practically, there may be situations in which submission to authority is limited. However, these situations are few and far between. Our focus should be on humility and obedience to authority in *all* circumstances. Submission may indeed have limits, but these limits are the exception rather than the rule. Obedience to God generally means obedience to those in authority over us.⁵

³Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1980), 82-83. Hence, Clark refuses to place any limits on the husband’s authority other than to say that righteousness, which he defines as obedience, “limits the authority and protects the subordinate” (82). Needless to say, this provides little guidance or protection for women who are faced with the reality of obeying abusive, sinful, and harmful husbands.

⁴Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 45.

⁵*Ibid.*, 38, emphasis hers. While this is an older work, it is very relevant to this discussion. Kassian has been quite influential in conservative circles for her writings on gender roles and feminism, particularly *The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), originally published as *The Feminist Gospel* in 1992. Kassian’s influence is also seen in the fact that she is currently a council member on the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Rebecca Jones argues that a wife should bring “all things” under her husband’s headship. After emphasizing that a husband’s authority is all-encompassing, she states, “we do not have the time to examine all the practicalities of submission. God places women in extremely difficult situations sometimes, and we are called to exercise great discernment as we ‘prove out’ the will of God” (*Does Christianity Squash Women? A Christian Looks at Womanhood* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005], 168). Unfortunately, she never gives women in these difficult situations any specific guidance to discern the will of God in terms of parameters of submission. This glaring omission is no doubt shaped by her failure to recognize the reality of spiritual immaturity, sin, and abuse in Christian homes. She states, “The Christian men I know treat their wives as precious treasures. They dote on them, admire them, depend on them, rejoice in them, cherish them, praise them, and sacrifice for them” (187).

But in actuality, universal human depravity has created a world in which power and authority are often misused and hence must be qualified. Scripture records hundreds of instances of ungodly authorities whose commands had to be disobeyed.⁶ Given the intimate nature of marriage, the abuse of authority and the dilemma of submission are particularly acute since even the more extreme forms of male abuse of power are common. For instance, one fourth to one third of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁷ And physical abuse rates in Christian homes are similar to societal rates.⁸ Less severe forms of abuse (non-criminal) are considerably more common. Kassian's presupposition, that submission to authority need not be qualified since situations requiring such a need is exceedingly rare, is utterly divorced from reality.⁹ Many of the ugly situations that thousands of Christian women continually deal

⁶I will not cite a litany of proof texts but will simply note that numerous godly individuals in Scripture were persecuted by domestic, religious, and civic authorities and repeatedly refused to submit to them. This list includes: David, Abigail, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, John, Stephen, Paul, and most significantly, Christ himself. It is often overlooked that Christ's religious authorities were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. He defied their authority virtually the entire period of his three year public ministry.

⁷Helen M. Eigengerg, *Women Battering in the United States: Till Death Do Us Part* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 2001), 62-85. One of the largest and most cited surveys of domestic violence is the Violence against Women Survey that was a joint effort by the National Institute for Justice and the Centers for Disease Control. It involved a random sample survey of 8,000 men and 8,000 women. This survey found a lifetime intimate assault rate for American women of 22% (25% if sexual assaults are included) (P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey* (Department of Justice; Washington, D.C., 1998). This report is available from: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>. Using a screening tool recommended by the American Medical Association, researchers in another study found a 31% lifetime prevalence for domestic violence among adult American women (R. M. Siegel, et al., "Screening for Domestic Violence in a Community Pediatric Setting," *Pediatrics* 104 [1999]: 874-77). Similarly, research in Canada indicates that that roughly one third of Canadian women will experience an intimate partner assault in their lifetime (Statistics Canada, "The Violence against Women Survey," 1994). This report is available from: <http://www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3896&lang=en&db=IMDB&dbg=f&adm=8&dis=2>.

⁸W. Annis and Roger R. Rice, "A Survey of Abuse Prevalence in the Christian Reformed Church," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 3 (2001): 7-40.

⁹Carol J. Schlueter gives numerous examples of the way in which evangelical writers who emphasize female submission refuse to address the reality of the abuse of male power ("Revitalizing Interpretations of Ephesians 5:22," *Pastoral Psychology* 45 [1997]: 322-25).

with are completely ignored in the non-egalitarian literature,¹⁰ leaving Christian women to fend for themselves when seeking to discern what obedience to Scripture looks like in their real world. And the stakes are very high when we relate marital submission to ethical issues such as abuse, pornography, and the treatment of children.

For instance, it is widely recognized that we are in the midst of a moral and social revolution due to the effects of pornography.¹¹ It is estimated that legal pornography is a twelve billion dollar annual industry.¹² In a recent online survey of over 10,000 individuals by the Kinsey Institute, 77% of the respondents indicated they viewed pornography at least monthly, and 19% indicated they viewed it daily.¹³ According to a 2004 poll of over 15,000 individuals conducted by MSNBC and *Elle Magazine*, three-fourths of the men indicated they had viewed or downloaded pornographic films or videos from the internet.¹⁴ And Christian men are also viewing and being indoctrinated by pornography with tragic frequency.¹⁵ Our current epidemic level of pornography usage is having a dramatic effect on marriage and male/female relationships

¹⁰My focus on this paper will be on the non-egalitarian literature for several reasons: (1) I am a non-egalitarian evangelical and am best able to critique my own theological camp; (2) since non-egalitarians in some manner affirm one directional female marital submission, their writings have considerable potential to be destructively misused in unhealthy marriages; (3) non-egalitarians have done the least to address issues of abuse of power in marriage. For instance, to my knowledge I am the first non-egalitarian Ph.D. trained theologian to write a book giving a systematic analysis of abuse (*Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005]).

¹¹On the relational, personal, and cultural impact of pornography, see Azy Barak and William A. Fisher, "The Future of Internet Sexuality," in *Sex and the Internet: A Guide for Clinicians* (ed. Al Cooper; New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 263-80; Al Cooper, ed., *Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force: A Special Issue of the Journal of Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2000); Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families* (New York: Times Books, 2005); Jillian Straus, *Unhooked Generation: The Truth about Why We're Still Single* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).

¹²Jerry Ropelato, "Internet Pornography Statistics"—this is available from: <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>.

¹³Paul, *Pornified*, 13.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵According to a 2000 survey conducted by *Christianity Today* of their readers regarding internet pornography, 33% of clergy and 36% of laity admitted visiting porn sites (Christian J. Gardner, "Tangled in the Worst of the Web," *Christianity Today* [March 5, 2001]: 42-49). Given the dramatic increase in the prevalence and usage of pornography in the past few years, I expect that if this survey were repeated today the figures would be noticeably higher.

since pornography usage has been shown to alter dramatically and quickly male users' overall attitudes toward women as well as their sexual expectations and demands.¹⁶ For instance, Dolf Zillman summarizes the findings of numerous research studies (including several of his own) and lists seventeen documented effects of pornography usage by men, all of which have staggering implications for Christian wives. These effects include: trivializing rape and child sexual abuse, creating great dissatisfaction with the physical appearance and sexual performance of one's female partner, dramatically decreasing the desire for female offspring (by 61%), altering perceptions of sexual normality and fostering the presumption that extreme sexual behaviors are practiced much more commonly than they really are, greatly increasing self reports of one's propensity to force a reluctant female partner to engage in sexual acts she is reluctant or unwilling to engage in, and greatly increasing (by over 25%) belief that males should dominate females.¹⁷ Even more frightening is the fact that significant **changes in male attitudes toward females have been documented after as little as one fifteen minute exposure to pornography.**¹⁸ Sadly, virtually none of the non-egalitarian marriage literature relates marital submission to the specific behaviors that pornography

¹⁶For instance, one study of young college men revealed that a relatively brief exposure to non-violent pornographic (viewing forty-eight minutes of pornographic movies once a week for six weeks) dramatically increased men's sexual callousness toward women, influenced them to trivialize rape, influenced them to have much less compassion for women in general, and created dissatisfaction with sexual reality (J. Bryant and D. Zillman, "Pornography, Sexual Callousness and the Trivialization of Rape," *The Journal of Communication* 32 [1982]: 10-21; see also Robert Jensen, "Cruel to be Hard: Men and Pornography," *Sexual Assault Report* [January/February 2004]: 33-34, 45-48—can be accessed online at: <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/pornography&cruelty.htm>. When we combine these finding with the reality that much current pornography is coupled with violence and is inherently misogynistic (cf. Dianna Russell, *Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny, and Rape* [Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998]), we can understand how pornography is having a dramatically destructive effect on how men view and treat their wives, making it much more likely that they will abuse their headship.

¹⁷Dolf Zillmann, "Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography," in *Pornography Research Advances and Policy Considerations* (ed. Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant; Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989), 127-57.

¹⁸Doug McKenzie-Mohr and Mark P. Zanna, "Treating Women as Sexual Objects: Look to the (Gender Schematic) Male Who Has Viewed Pornography," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 16 (1990): 296-308. Many of the studies Zillmann cites showed dramatic changes in male attitudes after very or relatively brief exposure to pornography.

has influenced men to request or demand from their wives or to the way pornography programs men to demean and objectify women.¹⁹ While a Christian wife with a basic knowledge of Scripture might be able to recognize that her husband's demand that she view pornography with him while they make love is clearly unbiblical and need not be submitted to, other demeaning actions or sexual behaviors she finds objectionable are not plainly addressed in Scripture. So must she submit to these since Eph 5:24 tells her that she must submit "in everything"?

Another critical area of confusion relates to a husband's authority over children. Are there parameters to a wife's submission in terms of her husband's irresponsible, harsh, or verbally abusive treatment of her children? These are not hypothetical constructs but realities that have enormous long term consequences. Various studies have shown that harsh and or neglectful parenting produces very significant long term damage.²⁰ Generally the conservative marriage literature does

¹⁹See Paul, *Pornified*, 16-19, 138-71. Paul specifically argues that pornography has directly influenced men to pressure their wives and girlfriends for group sex, oral sex, anal sex, and other degrading practices. Other sexual practices that pornography has unquestionably made appealing and acceptable include bondage and shaving of the woman's pubic hair. My wife, who is a family therapist, very frequently works with Christian women who are tormented by a sense of revulsion that their husbands make these kinds of sexual demands but are confused over what they must submit to. What helps to explain these sordid requests is the fact that sexual sin has an escalating quality due to the manner in which it deadens one's conscience (cf. Eph 4:18-19) so that "traditional" sexual intercourse is no longer sexually stimulating. Almost a decade ago feminist researcher Dianna Russell analyzed various forms of pornography and found that less than 5% of the sex pictured in the pornography studied depicted vaginal intercourse between only one man and only one woman (*Dangerous Relationships*, 18). Studies show that in the past decade pornography has become much more degraded, particularly in terms of violent content (Martin Barron and Michael Kimmel, "Sexual Violence in Three Pornographic Media: Toward a Sociological Explanation," *The Journal of Sex Research* 37 [2000]: 161-68). Thus, I would expect Russell's 5% finding to be much lower today.

²⁰For instance, Patrick Carnes's extensive research of adult sex addicts reveals that measured against national norms, 78% of the addicts he surveyed came from rigid (harsh, repressive) homes, and 87% came from disengaged (emotionally sterile, neglectful) homes (*Don't Call It Love: Recovery from Sexual Addiction* [New York: Bantam, 1991], 97, 101. We also know that the decided majority of adult child molesters report that their fathers were cold, distant, hostile, and aggressive (Julie McCormack, Stephen M. Hudson, and Tony Ward, "Sexual Offenders Perceptions of Their Early Interpersonal Relationships: An Attachment Perspective," *Journal of Sex Research* 39 [2002]: 85-94. Similarly, one of the characteristics of adolescent sexual offenders is that they tend to come from homes which are rigid and emotionally detached (Gary P. Bischof and Sandra M. Stith, "Family Environments of Adolescent

not give specifics on what a wife should submit to or tolerate in terms of her husband's harsh or neglectful parenting. And some of the literature that seeks to do so gives directives to wives that many evangelicals would find troubling and even dangerous. For instance, in a clarification of biblical submission, Beth Impson argues that unless a husband asks a wife to clearly violate Scripture, if a wife disagrees with her husband, she should state her concerns but "accept the [husband's] decision and let God deal with her husband's heart."²¹ Impson illustrates this principle with a story of a couple she knew. They had a disagreement over whether their children should wear seat belts in the car (apparently this was before seat belt laws). The wife believed seat belts were essential for the children's safety, but the husband believed it was an unnecessary inconvenience and "shrugged off her protest." The wife, being godly, practiced biblical submission by graciously submitting to her husband's decision to forego seat belts for the children. A few days later when the husband was driving he had to make a quick stop and one of the children suddenly tumbled into the front seat "screaming in terror." Impson argues that the fact that the child was not physically injured demonstrates that the wife's submissive response was biblical and God-honoring.²² Impson seemingly does not entertain the possibility that this experience, while not physically harmful, was psychologically traumatizing for the child. Nor does she seem to entertain the possibility that this "submissive" response could easily have led to the children being killed or seriously injured like thousands of other children whose parents had not insisted they wear seat belts. Clearly, it is imperative that the parameters of marital submission be clarified in light of real world realities.²³

Sex Offenders and Other Juvenile Delinquents," *Adolescence* 30 [1995]: 157-71). Clearly, harsh or neglectful parenting can cause profound, long term damage to children.

²¹Beth Impson, *Called to Womanhood: The Biblical View for Today's World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 125.

²²*Ibid.*, 126.

²³Given the potential harm to wives and children that ungodly or even unhealthy and immature men can cause, it is surprising and disturbing that Nancy Cobb and Connie Grigsby would state that the benefit of [biblical] submission is that the consequences of a decision falls on the husband and not the wife (*The Politically Incorrect Wife* [Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah, 2002], 138).

II. SURVEY OF MODELS OF MARITAL SUBMISSION

A. Unqualified Submission; Unqualified Male Authority

There is a significant body of marriage literature, particularly within Christian fundamentalism, that asserts that husbands have essentially unlimited authority. Hence, wives are obligated to give virtually unqualified submission. In this model male/female differences are accentuated and equality is at best de-emphasized. Women are explained to be unfit for leadership by virtue of their emotionality, weakness, and susceptibility to deception.²⁴ Thus, it is a grave offense for a woman to challenge a husband's leadership for this seriously distorts the ontologically based order for human relationships.²⁵

In a work that has sold over two million copies, Helen Andelin argues that God has ordained the husband to be the supreme authority. He, not the wife, has authority over large and small matters, including the discipline and care of children, religious affiliation, and even social behavior. To disobey a husband is to disobey God for, "the family is a theocracy, where the father's word is law."²⁶ Since the husband has unlimited authority from God, a wise wife will never appear to know more than her husband, will accept him neglecting his family, will accept and submit to a husband's infidelity, and will demonstrate true femininity by being dependent, weak, and fearful.²⁷ Elizabeth Hanford Rice articulates a similar

²⁴For instance, Elizabeth Hanford Rice states that women are more prone to error due to their emotionality. Thus, "That is the one reason God commanded her not to usurp authority over the man, so she can be protected from false doctrine" (*Me? Obey Him? The Obedient Wife and God's Way of Happiness and Blessing in the Home* [rev. ed.; Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1994], 22). Hanford Rice is the daughter of the late fundamentalist evangelist John R. Rice, which may help account for the fact that this book has been quite popular and has sold over 600,000 copies.

²⁵Cindy Schaap reveals this understanding of authority and submission when she states, "submission is a husband's God-designed need. Some ladies believe their husbands are brute beasts because they become 'bullies' when their leadership is threatened." She explains that when a husband feels his leadership is threatened, it emasculates him because it distorts his God-ordained manhood. So she candidly concludes, "I would worry if my husband did not feel enraged when bossed by me" (*A Woman's Purpose* [Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1992], 80).

²⁶Helen Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood* (rev. ed.; New York: Bantam, 1992), 110.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 119, 143, 367, 269. Andelin's model is very similar to a secular model put forth by Laura Doyle (*The Surrendered Wife: A Practical Guide for Finding Intimacy, Passion, and Peace with a Man* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001]). This work made the New York Times best seller list. Though Doyle calls herself a feminist and does not

model, stating that Scripture gives no restriction on a wife's obedience to her husband, for when a woman obeys her husband she is always obeying God.²⁸ She states that a husband's authority is so absolute that according to Scripture, "a woman must ignore her 'feelings' about the will of God, and do what her husband says."²⁹ She specifically explains that the husband's unfettered authority means a wife must submit to wife swapping, domestic violence, and child abuse.³⁰ Influential fundamentalist pastor Jack Hyles argues that a wife has no rights except to submit to her husband.³¹ Being a godly woman means letting the man get all the credit and deliberately choosing to always let the man win, even at ping-pong.³² Every human problem is caused when that which is inferior and subordinate refuses to submit to that which is stronger and superior.³³ Females must be obedient all their lives, so the best thing parents can do for their daughter is to teach her to obey "immediately, without question, and without argument," for in so doing they have "done a big favor for their future son-in-law."³⁴

Other fundamentalist writers do not use such extreme examples of female obedience, but nevertheless posit a model which gives the husband nearly absolute power and authority. Marlene Evans, for instance, states that a wife must never find ways around obeying her husband, must never correct her

advise wives to submit to physical or sexual abuse, she does tell them to submit to verbal abuse and to "surrender" or relinquish control in virtually every other aspect of life by responding to a husband's "crazy" requests by saying, "whatever you think" (19, 27-30, 35, 52-53, 158).

²⁸Hanford Rice, *Me? Obey Him?* 31, 40.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 60, 90. In a lesser known work, Dorothy McGuire, Carol Lewis, and Alvena Blatchley also argue that a husband's authority is so complete that a wife should submit to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and going to an X-rated movie. They illustrate by positively telling about a wife who submitted to a husband who was tried and convicted for trying to murder her (*Submission: Are There Limits?* [Denver: Tri-R Ministries, 1984], 36-42, 49, 52).

³¹Jack Hyles, *Woman the Completer* (Hammond, Ind.: Hyles Publications, 1981), 36. Under Hyles's ministry, First Baptist Church in Hammond, Indiana boasted of having the largest Sunday School in the world. While he is deceased, his books and sermons are still quite influential among certain American fundamentalists.

³²*Ibid.*, 40-41.

³³*Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴Jack Hyles, *How to Rear Children*, (repr.; Clayburg, Penn.: Revival Fires, 1998), 134.

husband (even in private), and does not even have the authority to make financial purchases apart from her husband.³⁵ Beneth Peters Jones states the wife must adapt more than the man since he is the head. Furthermore, due to the husband's great authority, she should never try to change him. Even if a husband is a tyrant or genuinely neglects his family, the wife should yield and give it to God.³⁶

B. Single Qualification Submission: All Encompassing Male Authority

Like the previous model, this one emphasizes the fact that God has ordained a rigid domestic authority structure. The husband is the God ordained leader for the home. His authority is great (he has the final authority and is to be obeyed) and it is extensive (it extends to every domain of life).³⁷ For instance, Lou Priolo argues that the husband's headship means he is responsible for essentially everything in his wife's life. Thus, he is to "preside over" his wife, and to "rule" and "control her" since he is the "boss."³⁸ This includes being responsible to know everything that is going on in the home, especially what his wife is doing, how she is doing it, and who all of her friends are.³⁹ With this knowledge he is to keep his wife from the dangers of becoming too close to their children, and from the dangers of bad friends, unsound books, and unhealthy music, all the while being aware of the real danger of being wrongly

³⁵Marlene Evans, *Marriage without Divorce* (Crown Point, Ind.: Christian Womanhood Publications, 2000), 52-53, 93. See also Beverly Hyles, *Woman the Assembler: Making Your Husband a Leader* (Hammond, Ind.: Hyles Publications, 1995). Hyles argues that short of actual physical abuse, a wife should bite her tongue in response to her husband's harsh discipline of their children, should always be the weaker vessel, and should never criticize her husband (73-76, 79).

³⁶Beneth Peters Jones, *Ribbing Him Rightly: The Ministry of the Christian Wife* (2d ed.; Greenville, S.C.: BJU Press, 2000), 24-26, 39-40. Peters Jones is the wife of Bob Jones III, the current president of Bob Jones University. This has been a popular book among fundamentalists.

³⁷For instance, Rebecca Jones says that a wife is to bring "all things" under her husband's headship, which she explains is "actively gathering, ordering, and submitting to your husband's control all those things that are under your supervision (including the checkbook and the children)" (*Does Christianity Squash Women?* 166-67).

³⁸Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding* (Amityville, N.Y.: Calvary, 1999), 219-21.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 187, 216.

(sinfully) influenced as a result of listening to her.⁴⁰ Similarly, Nancy Wilson states that a husband's authority is comprehensive, and necessitates the wife to submit to the husband "in everything." She illustrates this by telling about a time she and her husband were speaking. A woman came up to her to ask an innocent sounding question. Once she learned that the woman had asked her husband the same question, she rebuked the woman for dishonoring her authoritative "head." She instructed the woman that her husband's divine authority meant that she should have "asked her husband if it would be all right to get another opinion on the issue."⁴¹

But there are two substantive differences from the previous model: (1) spiritual equality between the sexes is emphasized,⁴² and (2) the husband's authority is plainly qualified. This single qualification is explained and illustrated in various ways, but it boils down to a single principle—a wife is always to submit to her husband unless he commands her to do something that clearly violates Scripture.⁴³ The book *The*

⁴⁰Ibid., 187-91, 197.

⁴¹Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands: Respect and the Christian Woman* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 1997), 16-17.

⁴²The emphasis on spiritual equality in this hierarchical model leads to some interesting explanations of marriage that strain the definition of equality. For instance, Elizabeth George writes an entire chapter entitled "Working as a Team" and yet the entire chapter deals with roles, repeatedly emphasizing female submission (*A Wife After God's Own Heart: Twelve Things that Really Matter in Your Marriage* [Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2004], 27-42). Likewise, Elyse Fitzpatrick argues that submission doesn't mean wives are inferior to their husbands, but at the same time, submission means that the wife is to embrace the husband's mission, calling, and vision, and to make it hers. She is to bring all of her gifts and strengths "to him [her husband] for his use, as he fulfills God's calling in his life" (emphasis mine) (*Helper by Design: God's Perfect Plan for Women in Marriage* [Chicago: Moody, 2003], 147, 154).

⁴³Wayne Grudem, for instance, argues that wives should submit (obey) their husbands "except when it would be sin to obey." He explains this exception in terms of a command from a husband that is "contrary to the clear moral teaching of Scripture" ("Wives Like Sarah and the Wives Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1-7," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991], 195). See also C. J. Mahaney, "How to Encourage Husbands to Lead and Wives to Follow," in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey; Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 207. Some who affirm this model are even more specific and narrow about this exception. Cobb and Grigsby state, "A wife is not obligated to follow her husband's leadership if it conflicts with *specific* scriptural commands" (emphasis mine) (*The Politically Incorrect Wife*, 149). James R. Slaughter also places a great burden on the wife by arguing, "Before a Christian wife refuses to submit to her husband, she should have *sound Biblical evidence* that to obey him would require her to disobey God (emphasis mine) ("Winning Unbelieving Husbands to Christ [1 Pet 3:1b-4]," *BSac* 153 (1996): 204).

Excellent Wife by Martha Peace is a good example of this model. In every section of the book Peace emphasizes the God ordained authority structure for the home. Female submission is explained over dozens of pages. She argues that men and women are both made in the image of God, but the woman was created for the man and he is to be the head.⁴⁴ The wife is to be submissive in *all things*, including small and seemingly unimportant requests, should consult her husband on all matters, should patiently bear her husband's sin against her, and can only appeal her husband's decisions one time when she disagrees.⁴⁵ But Peace is quite clear regarding the single qualification of the husband's authority: she is to be submissive in all things unless he "asks her to sin."⁴⁶ Elizabeth George's popular book, *A Woman after God's Own Heart* also articulates this model. She argues that submission is the biblical mandate for wives to "rank under" their husband by yielding the final decision making power to him in all areas of life, with a single exception: "if he asks you to violate some teaching from God's word."⁴⁷ But apart from this single exception, the husband's authority is all encompassing. For instance, in illustrating what godly submission looks like, she states that godly submission is reflected when a wife disagrees with her husband's requests by being silent, or better yet, by responding with a single word: "sure."⁴⁸ H. Dale Burke also argues that submission is not inferiority but willingly placing oneself under the authority of another.⁴⁹ He states that biblical submission does not mean violating divine commands, but uses Sarah's submission to Abraham when he lied and allowed her to be given to King Abimelech as a positive example of biblical submission. The lesson he draws from this biblical story is that, "God calls

⁴⁴Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, Minn.: Focus, 1999), 47-52.

⁴⁵Ibid., 138, 159-60, 143, 152 (Peace's emphasis).

⁴⁶Ibid., 138. She goes on to give several concrete and clear examples of this principle (140-45).

⁴⁷Elizabeth George, *A Woman after God's Own Heart* (Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1997), 69. This book has also been very popular, having sold over 700,000 copies.

⁴⁸Ibid., 70, 73.

⁴⁹H. Dale Burke, *Different by Design: God's Master Plan for Harmony between Men and Women in Marriage* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 84, 89.

wives to respect and follow the lead of the man He has brought into their lives.”⁵⁰ Burke furthermore implies that the husband’s authority is all encompassing when he illustrates a wife’s godly response to her incarcerated husband by refusing to make unilateral decisions with the children. When they had a request she would submit to his leadership by having the children wait until he called from prison, and then they could get his decision.⁵¹ Linda Dillow explains, “the limit of submission is this: total submission without personal sin.”⁵² But Dillow understands this exception very narrowly for she argues that Sarah was practicing biblical submission when she willingly submitted to Abraham’s lie to Pharaoh, in spite of the fact that it exposed her to being sexually assaulted.⁵³ She defines submission as “no resistance,” and argues that a wife should simply accept her husband with no attempt to change him. She illustrates this with a woman who learned to accept her alcoholic husband who came home in the middle of the night reeking of alcohol and perfume. Being a godly woman she did not challenge or confront him but simply offered to make him his favorite meal.⁵⁴ Larry Christenson also agrees that a wife is not to submit to a plainly sinful command, but argues that the God ordained hierarchy in marriage is so essential, and male authority is so potent and encompassing, that a wife should honor her husband’s command not to attend church. He gives an example of husbands who came to Christ under such circumstances, and argues that it shows, “how far God will go in honoring His own Divine Order for the family.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰Ibid., 102.

⁵¹Ibid., 96-97.

⁵²Linda Dillow, *Creative Counterpart: Becoming the Woman, Wife, and Mother You’ve Longed to Be* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 141. This book has sold over half a million copies and was originally published in 1977, evidencing its significant influence.

⁵³Ibid., 135.

⁵⁴Ibid., 83-84.

⁵⁵Larry Christenson, *The Christian Family* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1970), 42. Elsewhere Christenson highlights the expanse of the husband’s authority by arguing that the husband’s God ordained authority extends not only to the home and the church but to the whole of society (37). While this is an older work, it is worth noting because it sold well over a million copies and was one of the primary guides for Christian families in the 1970s and 1980s.

C. Multiple Qualification Submission: Limited Male Authority

This model is sometimes labeled “soft complementarian.” Curiously, several recent social science studies have revealed that most evangelical couples practice this model of submission/ headship,⁵⁶ and yet most of the evangelical literature on marriage reflects single qualification submission or egalitarianism (no unique male authority). Soft complementarianism affirms male headship and female submission, but significantly qualifies male headship by de-emphasizing or limiting male authority, defining it more in terms of the responsibility to sacrificially serve than in terms of authority to wield power over another.⁵⁷ Robert Lewis and William Hendricks articulate a multiple qualification submission. While their definition of marital submission sounds like the traditional view (“submission is a Christ like response to recognized leadership”), their clarification makes it clear that their model is not traditional single qualification submission in which the husband has all encompassing authority.⁵⁸ For instance, Lewis and Hendricks argue that the

⁵⁶John P. Bartkowski, “Distant Patriarchs or Expressive Dads? The Discourse and Practice of Fathering in Conservative Protestant Families,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (2000): 465-85; John P. Bartkowski *Remaking the Godly Marriage* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003); W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). A recent survey of 5,000 American couples revealed that women’s marital happiness is most strongly correlated with the husband’s emotional engagement as well as the husband being the primary bread winner, and equity in the division of housework (W. Bradford Wilcox and Steven L. Nock, “‘What’s Love Got to Do with It?’ Equality, Equity, Commitment and Women’s Marital Quality,” *Social Forces* 84 (2006): 1321-46. This is a practical description of soft complementarianism.

⁵⁷W. Bradford Wilcox notes that the soft patriarchy practiced by most evangelical couples is reflected in joint decision making, shared parenting, and shared domestic duties (*Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 191). For a detailed explanation of what soft complementarianism looks like in marriage, see Bill and Aida Spencer and Steven and Celestia Tracy, *Marriage at the Crossroads: Couples in Conversation about Discipleship, Gender Roles, Decision-Making and Intimacy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, forthcoming). In this work the Spencers explain and defend an egalitarian model of marriage and the Tracys explain and defend a soft complementarian model.

⁵⁸Robert Lewis and William Hendricks, *Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 134. For other soft complementarian models of gender roles, see Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, *Intimate Allies: Rediscovering God Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1995); Julianna Slattery, *Finding the Hero in Your Husband: Surrendering the Way God Intended* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Faith Communications, 2001); Gary Thomas,

biblical emphasis on submission is on empowering a husband “to pursue right behavior” not on “enabling wrong behavior.”⁵⁹ A wife’s role isn’t to submit but to love and help.⁶⁰ Headship doesn’t mean ultimate power or special privileges.⁶¹ If a husband and wife can’t agree, the husband should not press ahead and make a decision his wife is opposed to.⁶² They specifically illustrate with the story of a husband who seeks to get his wife to submit to his demands for sex while he watched pornographic movies. They argue that a wife should never submit to such a demand but must follow her own convictions before the Lord. Similarly they argue that **a wife should not submit to abuse because it enables a husband’s sinful behavior.**⁶³ Such principles significantly qualify a husband’s authority. Elsewhere in this book, a husband’s authority is not eliminated but de-emphasized, unlike the previous single qualification model which places great emphasis on a husband’s extensive authority.⁶⁴

III. BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the diverse models of male authority among evangelical and fundamentalist writers, it is essential that we consider whether Scripture places limits on a husband’s

Sacred Influence: What a Man Need from His Wife to be the Husband She Wants (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

⁵⁹Ibid., 135. See also Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville: Integrity, 2004), 219-23; and Dennis Rainey, *Lonely Husbands, Lonely Wives: Rekindling Intimacy in Every Marriage* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 141-48, 157-59.

⁶⁰Lewis and Hendricks, *Rocking the Roles*, 53.

⁶¹Ibid., 66.

⁶²Ibid., 233.

⁶³Ibid., 153.

⁶⁴The sub title of this book (*Building a Win-Win Marriage*) suggests that the authors de-emphasize male authority by placing the wife on level terms with her husband (not beneath him). Susan Hunt is another author whose submission model significantly qualifies male authority, though her model would not be accurately classified as soft complementarian (and given the fact that she is a CBMW Council Member, she probably would not accept this label). Hunt argues that biblical submission is not “oppressive submission.” A wife should not accept subjugation or allow herself to be dominated by her husband. Furthermore, “submission does not mean passively accepting an unhealthy relationship that is destructive to oneness” (*By Design: God’s Distinctive Calling for Women* [2d ed.; Wheaton: Crossway, 1998], 32-33). Unlike many traditional complementarian writers, she argues that Rebekah should not have submitted to Isaac and gone along with his lie to King Abimelech (*The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1997], 215).

authority. I believe there are at least four major biblical texts or doctrines that place considerable limits on male authority.

A. The Lordship of Christ in the Life of the Believer

Much of the conservative evangelical literature on marriage places great focus on the importance of submission to authority. This discussion generally centers on submission to earthly authorities, particularly husbands and parents, and emphasizes that submission to these earthly authorities is ultimately submission to God. Curiously absent from these discussions are two critical biblical affirmations. (1) **Due to human depravity, those with greater power will often abuse their power, and hence obedience to earthly authorities will often conflict with obedience to Christ.**⁶⁵ (2) **All earthly authorities are penultimate; Christ alone is the sovereign Lord of every believer.** Thus, any discussion of the nature and parameters of submission must begin with an affirmation of the lordship of Christ. Christ himself anticipated the challenge of conflicting loyalties, particularly due to familial ties. He warned his would be followers, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my

⁶⁵Many traditionalist authors either fail to address this issue or in some manner assert that earthly authorities rarely abuse their power so as to create a conflict for Christian wives who are commanded to submit. For examples of this, see Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall*, 38; Dorothy McGuire, Carol Lewis, and Alvena Blatchley, *Submission: Are There Limits?* (Denver: Tri-R Ministries, 1984), 30; Wilson, “Liberated through Submission,” 133-43. Impson denies that domestic violence or sexual assault is common and even places blame on women for being raped (*Called to Womanhood*, 61-64, 139-43). Jones maintains that all the Christian men she knows treat their wives as “precious treasures” and afford them the utmost love, praise, and respect (*Does Christianity Squash Women?* 187). She also argues that abused women would never stay with abusive husbands because of a pathological codependency, for women “are not stupid enough to desire suffering.” These writers exhibit profound ignorance of the realities of abuse. It is widely accepted by abuse experts (and validated by numerous studies) that one fourth to one third of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their life time and that evangelical men who sporadically attend church are more likely than men of any other religious group (and more likely than secular men) to assault their wives (Steven R. Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions,” *JETS* 50 [2007]: 573-94. For documentation of the widespread prevalence of physical and sexual abuse as well as the biblical affirmation that abuse is rampant, see Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 13-20, 225-27.

disciple” (Luke 14:26; cp. Matt 10:34-39).⁶⁶ This is a particularly strong statement of Christ’s lordship superseding all familial relationships in a Jewish culture that placed a premium on kinship loyalties.⁶⁷ The primacy of Christ’s lordship over all other loyalties and relationships is just as applicable to wives as it is to husbands. In other words, no earthly love or authority, neither a husband nor a wife should supersede our love and obedience to Christ. A husband’s authority does not extend over his wife’s spiritual life.

The NT household codes, particularly the Pauline codes, in fact apply this very principle. In spite of the fact that in Greco-Roman society the husband had tremendous power and authority over the family, including determining the family religion and spiritual life,⁶⁸ Paul makes it crystal clear that the husband is not the ultimate Kurios, Christ is. In particular, Col 4:1 reminds husbands that they are to be fair and just to their slaves since they also have a master in heaven (ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ // |). A strong case can be made that the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians serve to clarify the nature of Christ’s lordship over his church. In Colossians, for instance, the household code comes

⁶⁶Since Jesus only mentions leaving wives, some might draw the hasty conclusion that the primacy of following Christ over family extends only to the husband as the head of the family and not to the wife. But Jesus need not list every single family member to establish this point. Note that parallel or similar accounts of this teaching in Matt 10:37-38 and Mark 10:29-30 list various family members but mention neither husband nor wife; they are assumed.

⁶⁷On kinship and identity in the ancient Jewish world, see David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 158-73. It is significant that NT scholar Andreas Kostenberger, who affirms a traditional complementarian model of marriage, recognizes this point and notes, “Jesus himself set the example by repeatedly renouncing his own natural family ties where they potentially stood in conflict with higher spiritual loyalties. . . . Rather than preaching a gospel urging believers to ‘focus on the family’ . . . Jesus placed natural kinship ties into the larger context of the kingdom of God” (“Marriage and Family in the New Testament,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* [ed. Ken M. Campbell; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003], 246-47).

⁶⁸On the great legal power husbands possessed in the ancient Roman world over all other family members (the rule of *patria potestas*) see K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking, 1980), 93-122; Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 205-31; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1975), 190-204; Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

immediately after the command to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (3:17). This observation, along with the overriding emphasis in the following code that family behavior is christologically governed (3:18, 21, 22, 23, 4:1), strongly supports the thesis that the code is given to demonstrate Christ's lordship in the life of the believer.⁶⁹ Christ alone is the ultimate Lord of life, and Lord of the household. This concept in and of itself governs a husband's authority over his family.

When we compare the Pauline household codes (that are very similar in structure to the ancient secular household codes), we see several notable differences that also highlight a limitation of the husband's authority. In the secular codes, husbands are given complete authority over the rest of the household. This authority notably included final religious authority. For example, the influential first century moral philosopher Plutarch wrote a famous treatise on marriage entitled "Advice to Bride and Groom." His instruction to wives highlights the great spiritual authority of husbands: "A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions."⁷⁰

This great authority that Plutarch gives to husbands is contrasted by the Pauline household codes that emphasize the fact that Christ is the supreme authority of both husbands and wives. Plutarch furthermore argues that a virtuous wife: should have no feeling of her own, but should take on her husband's;

⁶⁹Robert S. Nash gives convincing arguments from literary structure, polemical setting, and social setting that the Colossian household code serves to demonstrate Christ's lordship over his church ("The Role of the *Haustafeln* in Colossians and Ephesians" [Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982], 156-80). In terms of literary structure, Nash demonstrates that Col 2:6-7 is the *propositio* (basic premise of the argument) of Colossians, and *exempla* are given in 3:5-4:6 to give concrete application to the *propositio*. The *propositio* is repeated in 3:17 with the call to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. A final *exemplum* is given in the form of a household code in 3:18-4:1. Thus, the household code serves to clarify and illustrate the nature of Christ's supreme lordship in the life of the believer. Nash also demonstrates that the household code in Ephesians also serves a similar rhetorical purpose ("The Role of the *Haustafeln*," 287-90).

⁷⁰Plutarch, *Moralia* 140.19.

should graciously accept her husband having a mistress; should only be visible in her husband's company, and when he is away she should hide herself at home; should do her talking to or through her husband.⁷¹ Nowhere in the Pauline household codes do we see this type of one-sided patriarchal focus (though limited male authority is still affirmed).⁷² This discrepancy between the Pauline and secular household codes is ultimately based on a denial of male/female equality in the latter. Owing primarily to Aristotle's influence, Greco-Roman moral philosophers enjoined female submission based on the husband's ontological superiority.⁷³ This is particularly understood based on the husband's superior rational faculties. Men are to rule the household since "a slave can have no deliberative faculty, a woman but a weak one, a child an imperfect one."⁷⁴ But in Colossians and Ephesians the husband is not given unbridled power, nor does he have authority because he is superior. Furthermore, in many of the Greco-Roman codes the husband has the right and even the

⁷¹Ibid., 140.14, 16; 139.9; 142.32.

⁷²Carolyn Osiek comments on the manner in which the Ephesian household code compares to Greco-Roman codes. She argues that in the Ephesian code "the dominance-submission pattern is still there, but it has been radically changed, from treatise on male dominance to exhortation to mutual relationships in Christ" ("The Bride of Christ [Ephesians 5:22-33]: A Problematic Wedding," *BTB* 32 [2002]: 31). See also Russ Dudrey, "'Submit Yourselves to One Another': A Socio-Historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15-6:9," *ReQ* 41 (1999): 27-44.

⁷³On Aristotle's seminal influence on later household codes, particularly on male authority based on ontological superiority, cf. David L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres* (ed. David Aune; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 25-50; idem, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁷⁴Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.13. The Aristotelian ontological basis for subordination of family members seems to have directly influenced later moralists and philosophers. Philo argues that Eve fell into sin because of her "unstable and rash mind" for "in human beings the mind occupies the rank of the man, and the sensations that of the woman" (*De Virt* 19). Given this perceived ontological difference, it is understandable that Philo says wives should serve their husbands "in the spirit of reasonable obedience in all things" (*Hypoth.* 7.3). Like Aristotle, he speaks of children and slaves as belonging to the "inferior class" (*Decal.* 165), though he does not base their placement there on nature. Josephus boldly declares "a woman is inferior to her husband in all things. Let her therefore be obedient to him" (*Cont. Ap.* 2.25). Cicero approvingly cites Aristotle who places "boys, weak women, slaves, and the free men most like slaves" in the same state based on their sensual orientation (*De Off.* 2.57). This is similar to the ideology of Aristotle (*Pol.* 1.1254a14-1255b16) where Aristotle speaks of slavery (and subordination) necessitated by nature.

responsibility to make his wife submit.⁷⁵ The husband nowhere has such extensive authority in the NT. Rather, **husbands are not commanded to rule their wives but to nurture them, cherish them, and not be bitter against them (Eph 5:25, 28-29, 33; Col 3:19)**. The command to submit is given directly to wives. It indicates a voluntary surrender as to the Lord, her true and ultimate authority (Col 3:18 “as is fitting in the Lord”).⁷⁶ Again, we see that the husband’s authority is limited in extent.

B. The Context of Ephesians 5

We will look more specifically at the nature of submission itself in the next section, particularly the meaning of ὑποτάσσω. But at this juncture we should note that many fundamentalists and traditional complementarians (single qualification submission) argue that submission as commanded in Eph 5:22 and Col 3:18 has military connotations, for the Greek word ὑποτάσσω is said to mean “to rank under.” Thus, wives are to submit to their husbands just as a soldier submits to the orders of his or her superior ranking officer.⁷⁷ This etymological understanding of ὑποτάσσω appears to shape strongly their understanding of submission. For while they give assent to equality in marriage, their explanations and examples of marital submission belie equality. They describe, rather, a military type of hierarchy of an inferior to a superior. For

⁷⁵For instance, Plutarch, who has a more charitable view of women than most ancient philosophers, argues, “control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as the owner has control of a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body” (*Moralia* 142.33).

⁷⁶Not only is the submission command in Colossians and Ephesians given directly to the wife, but in both instances the middle voice is used that highlights the voluntary nature of the command and softens it (for arguments for the implied verb in Eph 5:22 being middle voice and not passive, cf. Harold H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 731-32). Thus, Ceslas Spicq comments, “the use of the middle voice (ὑποτάσσομαι, cf. Col 3:18) emphasizes the voluntary character of the submission and alleviates whatever might be humiliating about subordination, whatever suggests inferiority,” *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “ὑποτάσσω” (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994). Luke 10:17, 20 appear to be the only times in the NT that ὑποτάσσω in the middle voice refers to non-voluntary, forced submission.

⁷⁷Fitzpatrick, *Helper by Design*, 154; George, *A Woman After God’s Own Heart*, 65, 70-73. Andreas Kostenberger, on the other hand, while arguing for a complementarian model of marriage, expressly rejects a military model of submission in marriage (*God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 75.

instance, we have already noted that various traditional writers assert that biblical submission means a wife is not to have her own dreams, should never correct her husband or at most correct him only once, should respond to her husband when she disagrees by simply saying “sure,” should see that he always gets the credit, and should adapt more than he should since he is the head. These descriptions of marital submission make perfect sense in a military context in which the person of lower rank gives unqualified, blind obedience to the superior officer. Commands are not to be questioned they are simply to be obeyed. Disobedience often merits harsh consequences, since military order is based on a rigid power structure. And fear of consequences helps to maintain order and stimulate unwavering obedience. Furthermore, military authority is, theoretically at least, based on superiority. One receives increases in rank based on knowledge, skill, and positive performance. Hence, lower ranking officers are theoretically inferior in knowledge and skill to higher ranking officers.

But nothing in this military model fits the context of Eph 5:22-33. Rather, the discussion of marital relationships in this passage centers on an intimate, one flesh relationship between equals, not a power based hierarchy. The husband is to exercise not military type headship over his wife but is to nurture, love, and serve her in the most intimate and sacrificial manner. This indicates that the husband’s role as head is not based on a military type of hierarchical power structure. Rather, this suggests the husband’s headship is more about his responsibility to serve his wife.⁷⁸

C. Eph 5:24 – “Submit in Everything”

Perhaps the single most influential verse in the NT affecting evangelical understandings of female marital

⁷⁸As Craig Blomberg notes, “Their [the husbands’] authority is not one of privilege but of responsibility” (“Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [rev. ed.; ed. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 174-75); cf. also John E. Toews, “Paul’s Radical Vision for the Family,” *Direction* 19 (1990): 29-38. Toews insightfully notes, “headship and power language are redefined in the most radical terms. To be the head is to love and to give up self for the sake of the other” (37).

submission is Eph 5:24, “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” Due to the constraints of this study, we will only be able to make a few observations about this text that help to clarify the nature and extent of submission Paul is urging.

1. The command is for submission, not obedience

Though some recent scholars have tried to give a novel meaning to this verb, arguing that it can mean simply, “to respect,”⁷⁹ this lacks clear historical attestation. While ὑποτάσσω has a range of meaning, it does generally denote authority by indicating a willingness to yield to, defer, or follow another. Peter T. O’Brien notes, “In the forty or so New Testament occurrences the verb carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to it.”⁸⁰ But we must be careful to recognize that when used of humans, ὑποτάσσω does not denote unbridled power. Thus, many commentators have observed that ὑποτάσσω indicates submission, not obedience.⁸¹ Obedience is what Paul asks slaves and children to give their parents and masters, but this is not what he asks of wives.⁸² So instead of asking wives to obey their husbands as a slave obeys a master who is more powerful, he is asking wives, as equals, to voluntarily yield to their husbands. This usage of ὑποτάσσω for wives is probably similar to other uses of ὑποτάσσω in the NT and the early Christian literature indicating “voluntary

⁷⁹C. S. Keener, “Man and Woman,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. Gerald H. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 3.2.

⁸⁰Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 399; see also G. Dellling, “ὑποτάσσω,” *TDNT*. In the NT ὑποτάσσω is used of the submission of all believers to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1), the spirits of the prophets being subject to the prophets (1 Cor 14:32), all things being made subject to God (1 Cor 15:28), of holy women being submissive to their husbands (1 Pet 3:5), and the future subjection of the world to come to Christ (Heb 2:5-8). Both biblical and extra biblical usage of ὑποτάσσω confirm that it generally carries a sense of authority and subjection.

⁸¹Spicq, “ὑποτάσσω,” 424.

⁸²Paul uses the verb ὑπακούω in Eph 6:1, 5 and Col 3:20 of children and slaves. Most commentators affirm that ὑπακούω, unlike ὑποτάσσω, denotes obedience, and thus the usage of the latter for wives is significant (Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” 174; Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984], 269; similarly Marcus Barth, *Colossians* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 433-35, 440-42; contra Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 734-35).

yielding to another in love.” For instance, in 1 Cor 16:16 the Corinthians are urged to submit (yield in love) to the household of Stephanas.⁸³ Similarly, several decades later the command is given to this same church, “let each man be subject to his neighbor” (1 Clem 38:1). This is not to suggest that there is no authority inherent in ὑποτάσσω, but notes that it conveys a softened authority that is best understood in terms of voluntarily yielding to another in love. Note for instance that Peter commands the younger men to submit to the older, but softens the authority indicated with ὑποτάσσω by following this command immediately with another, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (1 Pet 5:5). We also see the limitation of authority in ὑποτάσσω by noting that this word is used of Christ being submissive to his earthly parents (Luke 2:51), and yet this statement comes shortly after he created great anxiety in his parents by going to the temple without notifying them. When his mother scolded him for this, he gently chided her in return for not anticipating that he would be attending to heavenly business that transcended his ties to his earthly family (Luke 2:48-49). *Christ was submissive to his parents and yet he corrected them and did not conform to their demands.*

2. Husbands are not Christ

Paul sets up the command to wives with an analogy that can easily be misconstrued—as the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands. The point here is that marital submission is appropriate, logical, and Christian. This analogy reveals that submission is based on a love relationship in which one party yields to another who uses his power to sacrifice on her behalf. But Ben Witherington astutely notes that we have a comparison, not an identification, here, and thus

⁸³So Delling, TDNT, s.v. “ὑποτάσσω”; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 830-31.

the analogy should not be pressed beyond its bounds.⁸⁴ Wives are to submit to their husbands but their husbands are not being identified with Christ. The dissimilarities in this analogy are manifold: believers and Christ are not equals as husbands and wives are; husbands are not sinless, let alone divine, as Christ is; Christ is to be worshiped but husbands are to be respected; Christ is the Lord of the universe with all power and authority, whereas husbands are finite mortals with very limited power and authority. So the church's submission to Christ becomes an analogy to the wife's submission to her husband, but all analogies have their limits. A wife's submission to Christ is not the same as her submission to her husband for he is not Christ.

3. Submit "in everything" cannot mean every single thing

We noted earlier that in the Greco-Roman household codes wives were expected to take their husbands' religion so obedience would include submission to a husband's pagan religion. But the NT makes it clear that allegiance and obedience to Christ trumps all other allegiances. **Believers are never to obey a human authority who commands them to disobey Christ.** So unless Paul is patently contradicting other scriptural teaching, Eph 5:24 cannot mean that wives should submit to every single command or request from their husbands. **"In everything" (ἐν παντί) most likely means "in every sphere or category of life."**⁸⁵ Charles Hodge comments on this phrase, "This of course does not mean that the authority of the husband is unlimited. It teaches its extent not its degree. It extends over all departments, but is limited in all."⁸⁶ Others assert that this phrase ("submit in everything") is self-limiting and refers to everything pertaining to the husband's legitimate authority.⁸⁷ In short, Paul commands wives not to obey every

⁸⁴Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55. The danger of pressing this analogy too far is seen when, based on this passage and others, Douglas Wilson declares that a husband, as head, is responsible for all problems and sin in his family, since Christ took responsibility for the sins of his people (*Federal Husband* [Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 1999], 12).

⁸⁵Blomberg, "Women in Ministry," 173; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 417.

⁸⁶Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1856), 110.

⁸⁷G. Wilson, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1978), 116.

single dictate from their husband but rather to be broadly responsive to their husbands' leadership instead of limiting their response to a few narrow issues of their choosing.

d. Broad biblical teaching on women

While all traditional complementarians and most fundamentalists affirm male/female equality in theory, they rarely develop this truth practically or biblically. Worse yet, they often undermine this doctrine in their explanation of female submission. Wives who are to follow only their husbands' dreams, must defer to him in everything, and have little or no right to correct their husbands, are not acting as equals. Hence, a brief review of the biblical data is warranted. The creation account itself highlights male/female equality. When God created in his own image, he created "male and female" (Gen 1:26-28). Furthermore, the command to have dominion over all of creation was not gender differentiated. It was given to the man and to the woman (Gen 1:28). When God created the woman, he created her as a "helper." The Hebrew phrase used here translated "helper corresponding to" (*ezer kenegdo*) conveys the idea of one who complements as an equal by filling or complementing that which is lacking.⁸⁸ It is often noted that *ezer* is almost always used in the Hebrew Scriptures of God himself and does not indicate an inferior.⁸⁹ Thus, some have correctly noted, "woman was not created to serve man but to serve with man." In the NT we see Jesus contravening strong Jewish patriarchal custom by treating women as equals. He allowed women to sit at his feet and receive instruction (Luke 10:38-42), travel with him and the male disciples (Luke 8:1-3), and most amazingly, be the first

⁸⁸Thus, Gordon Wenham notes that this phrase conveys complementation and literally means "helper like opposite him." So he translates it "helper matching him" (*Genesis 1-15* [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987], 68). Victor P. Hamilton notes the significance of this phrase, "Thus the new creation [the woman] will neither be a superior nor an inferior, but an equal" (*The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 175).

⁸⁹Contra David Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Irredeemably Andocentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 25-48.

witnesses of his resurrection (John 20:17).⁹⁰ Similarly, the early church affirmed the equality of women. Women waited with the male disciples for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14), received the Spirit just as male believers did (Acts 2:2-4; 1 Cor 12:13), and prophesied (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). Paul repeatedly affirmed the spiritual equality of women, arguing that in Christ all gender and racial spiritual barriers have been abolished (Gal 3:28). Furthermore, the fact that Paul treated women as equal partners in ministry is seen by him calling women co-workers in gospel ministry (Phil 2:2-3; Rom 16:3-4) and by his commendation of four specific women as those who “worked hard in the Lord” (Rom 16:6, 12). This same description is used of the special work of the gospel ministry, including his own apostolic ministry (1 Cor 4:12; 15:10; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16). Finally, we should note that while Paul never specifically commands husbands to submit to wives, he does tell husbands to defer sacrificially to their wives’ needs (Eph 5:25-29; cp. 1 Pet 3:7). In terms of marital sexual rights, in 1 Cor 7:4 Paul specifically limits the husband’s authority by saying the husband does not have sexual authority over his own body, rather his wife has that authority (ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ἡ γυνή).

*IV. SUMMARY PRINCIPLES REGARDING
THE PARAMETERS OF FEMALE SUBMISSION*

I have argued that the NT significantly qualifies a husband’s authority and that male headship in marriage is not primarily about power over but about the responsibility to serve one’s spouse. Having said that, I have also argued that the NT does assign some unique authority to the husband, and the wife does have a responsibility to willingly respond to her husband’s leadership. In healthy marriages in which husbands love and serve their wives sacrificially, wives respect their husbands, and both husband and wife seek the Lord on all decisions, there will be very few instances in which a couple

⁹⁰For a detailed scholarly analysis of the women in the gospels, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

comes to an impasse. Lewis and Hendricks are surely correct to say that when these rare moments occur, the husband should not just go ahead and make a decision his wife is opposed to. Rather, the husband should seek wise counsel from others before taking responsibility for making a final decision. However, many Christian marriages are not healthy and wives who desire to be obedient to Scripture need and deserve to have the extent of a husband's authority clarified. I will now propose six specific limits to a husband's authority over his wife. In other words, a wife need not and must not surrender to her husband's authority when any of the following principles are applicable.

1. *A wife must not submit to her husband when obedience to him would violate a biblical principle (not just a direct biblical statement).* All but the most extreme fundamentalists agree that a wife should not obey her husband if it involves violating a direct command of Scripture. But many moral issues wives face today are not directly addressed in Scripture (internet pornography, *in vitro* fertilization, gambling, cosmetic surgery, abortion, sexual fetishes, etc.). If we accept the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, then we must not restrict a woman's right to refuse to submit to her husband to those instances in which she can cite a direct biblical statement that contradicts her husband's command.⁹¹ For instance, my wife who is a licensed professional counselor has worked with numerous Christian wives who struggle with a husband's decree that she participate in anal sex, have cosmetic surgery (particularly breast implants), or shave her pubic hair. None of these activities are addressed directly in Scripture, but many if not most Christian ethicists would argue that these behaviors violate biblical principles regarding sexuality, marriage, and the proper care of the body. Often a wife may not be able to point to a specific biblical text to justify her objection to her husband's command but will only be able to

⁹¹For example, the Westminster Confession articulates this as follows: "Everything necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (I.VI).

appeal to her sense of the broad teachings of Scripture which she truly believes are applicable to the issue at hand.⁹²

2. *A wife must not submit to her husband when obedience to him would compromise her relationship with Christ.* We have noted that Christ, not a husband, is a Christian wife's supreme Lord. She is Christ's bride first and foremost. The early Christian apostles were commanded by their religious authorities to quit teaching about Christ. Their response is instructive: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Modern Christian wives must recognize that their first allegiance is to Christ. Their husband is neither their priest nor their lord. While most non-egalitarians would agree that a husband's leadership includes taking the initiative to help his family grow spiritually, we must also affirm that a wife is responsible to nurture her own spiritual life. Hence, a husband has no right to dictate his wife's relationship with Christ. In practical terms this means a wife should not obey her husband if he tells her not to go to church or to a Bible study, forbids her from going to a counselor, pastor, or Christian advisor, or forbids her from spending time with a trusted friend.⁹³

⁹²Many conservatives will find appealing to broad themes of Scripture without having a specific supporting proof text to be far too subjective and hence an unacceptable moral guideline (particularly if the husband is appealing to a specific biblical text to support his position). In response, I would again emphasize that since many of the moral issues of our day are not addressed directly in Scripture, modern Christians (especially lay people) must be given the freedom to apply scriptural principles in broad ways. While this is a somewhat subjective process, so are other central aspects of the Christian life, particularly life in the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:14; Gal 5:15, 25). I would also note the relevance of the slavery debate in America one hundred and fifty years ago to the principle of allowing believers to make moral judgments without having specific corroborating proof texts. On the whole, the pro-slavery writers were the ones who built their arguments directly from Scripture, whereas the abolitionists most often appealed to broad biblical themes of justice, love, brotherhood, etc. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *American Slavery* historians, note that abolitionists, "increasingly retreated to the swampy terrain of individual conscience," but pro-slavery southerners "took great comfort in the Bible's demonstrable justification of slavery, which led them to attend carefully to the Bible's pronouncements on other matters as well, for the Word of God referred directly, not abstractly to their society" ("The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View," *JAAR* 55 [1987]: 215, cited by Wayne A. Meeks, "The 'Haustafeln' and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters* [ed. Eugene H. Lovering and Jerry L. Sumney; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 232).

⁹³Contra Nancy Wilson, who argues that a woman must have her husband's permission even to get biblical counseling from her pastor (*The Fruit of Her Hands*, 28). In Scripture, Jonathan would be a good example of a godly individual whose authority (his father King Saul) did not want him to have a relationship with David.

3. *A wife must not submit to her husband when obedience to him would violate her conscience.* Sometimes a husband will order his wife to do something that she cannot identify as patently unbiblical, and yet the behavior is internally objectionable to her. That is, it would violate her conscience. Again, based on the fact that Christ is her Lord, and based on Paul's teaching that we must always act in faith before Christ and not violate our conscience (Rom 14:22-23), a wife should not obey a husband if doing so will violate her conscience.⁹⁴ This principle is particularly helpful in our culture when a husband requests his wife to participate in sexual practices that she finds objectionable.

4. *A wife must not submit to her husband when obedience to him would compromise the care, nurture, and protection of her children.*⁹⁵ God calls adults to prioritize protecting and caring for the vulnerable, particularly children (Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3). Care for the vulnerable, including children, is described as the purest form of religion (Jas 1:27). In Scripture, both fathers and mothers have a responsibility to care for their children physically and spiritually (Deut 6:4-7; Prov 31: 10-31; Eph 2:7-8, 11-12). Thus, children are commanded to obey their fathers *and* their mothers (Prov 1:8; Eph 6:1). As we noted in the introduction, various studies have shown that not only physically abusive but harsh and verbally abusive parenting produces very significant long term damage. We should particularly note that children innately develop their sense of God's character from their experience with their earthly father. So children whose fathers are abusive or harsh

Jonathan, however, disobeyed his father and maintained his deep friendship with David (1 Samuel 19-20).

⁹⁴Contra Dillow who argues that a wife can only disobey her husband if he commands her to do something that directly contradicts Scripture since "an individual's conscience is not always a reliable guide, and neither is the feeling of being led by the Lord" (*Creative Counterpart*, 141); James R. Slaughter also seems to say a wife must obey her husband even when it violates her conscience, such as participating in a sexual practice she finds distasteful ("Submission of Wives [1 Pet 3:1a] in the Context of 1 Peter," *BSac* 153 [1996]: 74). Martin Lloyd-Jones, on the other hand, even though he was a traditional complementarian who strongly emphasizes male authority in the home, explained that "submit in everything" does not mean a wife should violate her own conscience (*Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 126).

⁹⁵Cf. Slattery, *Finding the Hero*, 68-75.

develop distorted views of their heavenly father. Thus, if a husband is harsh, verbally abusive, or uses excessive forms of punishment (including physical abuse), a wife has a moral obligation to protect the children regardless of her husband's requests or demands.

Years ago in pastoral ministry I worked with a man who had lost his marriage due to his compulsive sexual sin. He was one of the most compulsive and self destructive addicts I have ever worked with, in spite of his charm and knowledge of Scripture. As we worked on his personal history to ascertain patterns and roots of his sinful behavior, he described a childhood incident that had been extremely influential in his development. When he was five years old he stole a small object from his neighbor. When questioned about this, he lied and said he knew nothing about the missing item. Before long his parents discovered his deception. His father, who was an official in their small town, was quite embarrassed that his son had lied and hurt his own reputation. So the next morning the father wrote "liar" in red lipstick across his son's forehead, made the son go outside, and locked the door behind him, forcing him to spend the entire day publicly exposed with this vice emblazoned on his forehead. This father's harsh, humiliating punishment proved to be very destructive for this boy. Unfortunately, the boy's mother did not have the courage or feel she had the right to intervene and go against her husband.⁹⁶

5. *A wife must not submit to her husband when obedience to him would enable (facilitate) her husband's sin.*⁹⁷ Not only are wives to avoid obeying a husband's command to sin, but they should also avoid following any commands that facilitate a husband's sin. The holiness of God requires that we not enable others to sin with greater ease. One of the best biblical examples of this concept is seen in Abigail whose

⁹⁶Dan Allender gives a very helpful personal illustration of a time his wife refused his direct order when he was being harsh with their son. Allender notes that her refusal to submit to his harsh parenting protected their son and stimulated his repentance (*How Children Raise Parents: The Art of Listening to Your Family* [Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook, 2005], 196).

⁹⁷Lewis and Hendricks, *Rocking the Roles*, 135; Slattery, *Finding the Hero*, 75-81; Thomas, *Sacred Influence*, 32-34, 200-201.

foolish husband Nabal refused to give aid to David and his men (1 Sam 25:2-13). While the text does not specifically say that he forbade Abigail from assisting David, it is clearly implied since Abigail gave generous supplies to David's men but kept her actions from her husband (1 Sam 25:19). David was so impressed with Abigail's character that after Nabal died he asked her to become his wife (1 Sam 25:39-42). In our culture, this principle of not submitting when obedience would facilitate sin is applicable when a wife disobeys an alcoholic husband who asks her to go purchase him more alcohol, or when this same husband commands her not to tell their pastor about his drinking problem. It is also applicable to the woman who asked me how she should respond to her husband who ordered her always to walk several steps behind him in public. This command was part of a broad pattern of demeaning behaviors toward her and others. It also reflected a pattern of pride that caused him to reject attempts by his own church elders to confront his behavior. So I advised her that she should not obey her husband's command, since it would only facilitate his sin (and demean her).

6. *A wife must not submit to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.*⁹⁸ While several complementarian writers have recently acknowledged that biblical submission does not entail submitting to abuse,⁹⁹ there is still great confusion on how the church in general and wives in particular should respond to abuse.¹⁰⁰ It is thus important to recognize that enduring avoidable abuse, including at the hands of one's authorities, is not commended biblically. Scripture affirms the wisdom and propriety of fleeing an abuser, "a prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it" (Prov 22:3). There are numerous biblical accounts of godly

⁹⁸For a more detailed analysis of this topic, particularly the relevance of 1 Pet 2:13-25, that is often used to counsel wives to follow the example of Jesus and submit to abusive husbands, see Steven R. Tracy, "Domestic Violence and Redemptive Suffering in First Peter," *CTJ* 41 (2006): 279-96.

⁹⁹For example, Dillow, *Creative Counterpart*, 143 (which is a distinct change from the first edition of the book); Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 491-95; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 745-46; Hunt, *By Design*, 32-33, 215.

¹⁰⁰Steven R. Tracy, "Clergy Responses to Domestic Violence," *Priscilla Papers* 21 (2007): 9-16 and idem, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence."

individuals who avoided physical abuse from their authorities (civic and religious) whenever possible. For instance, David (1 Sam 18:11; 19:10; 23:14), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Jesus (John 7:1; 8:59), and Paul (Acts 9:22-25; 14:5; 17:8-10) all fled from avoidable assaults by kings, priests, and other authorities. David in particular fled from Saul for several years, and yet he was respectful and submissive to Saul's authority (1 Sam 24:4-6; 26:8-11) and was greatly blessed by God.

Not only is it entirely biblical for a wife to flee or otherwise refuse to submit to abuse of her and her children's physical and emotional well being, but not submitting to an abusive husband is also best for the husband. Wives are to do good to their husbands (Prov 31:12), and one of the best ways wives of abusive husbands can do this is by challenging the abusive behavior through fleeing, filing assault charges, contacting church authorities, or by otherwise stimulating real accountability and painful consequences for the abusive behavior. Refusing to submit to abuse and instead taking action to not allow it to continue is good for the husband because: (1) this is one of the best ways to break through the abusers' distorted thinking and stimulate repentance;¹⁰¹ (2) It decreases the temporal and eternal consequences that accrue the longer a husband abuses.¹⁰² In cases of unrepentant abuse divorce may

¹⁰¹Abuse experts strongly emphasize that real accountability, including painful consequences, is one the most critical factors for helping abusive men change. R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash, Kate Cavanagh, and Ruth Lewis analyzed various criminal justice responses and treatment programs for abusive men and concluded that the key to changing violence against women in a given society is for there to be low tolerance for such behavior coupled with various forms of control and costs for perpetrators of domestic violence (*Changing Violent Men* [Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2000], 183-84). Edward Gondolf did a four-year follow up analysis of batterer treatment programs and found they were substantially effective in reducing domestic violence (for 80% of the participants), but the key to improvement lies in the entire community doing a better job of holding men accountable for violent behavior (*Batterer Intervention Systems: Issues, Outcomes, and Recommendations* [Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002], 217-18; see also Mary Nomme Russell, *Confronting Abusive Beliefs: Group Treatment for Abusive Men* [Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995]; Richard Stordeur and Richard Stille, *Ending Men's Violence against Their Partners: One Road to Peace* [Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1989]).

¹⁰²Note, for instance, the way Abigail's refusal to submit to Nabal's implied command not to support David and his men kept David from killing him (Sam 25:1-35). Various passages affirm God's hatred of abuse and abusers (Ps 11:5; Prov 6:16-19; Ezek 9:9-10) and proclaim certain, overwhelming judgment on abusers (Isa 10:1-2; Ezek 22:11, 21; Joel 3:19; Amos 4:1-3; Mic 2:1-2; 3:9-12; Matt 18:5-6).

well be a tragic necessity. Remarriage in such instances is a separate issue which has not received adequate attention by Evangelical scholars. Some Evangelical scholars plainly state that spousal abuse is grounds for both divorce and remarriage. David Instone-Brewer makes this argument primarily by applying Exod 21:10-11 to 1 Cor 7:12f.¹⁰³ Craig Keener also argues that spousal abuse is grounds for divorce and remarriage by arguing that physical abuse is in a sense a form of infidelity and thus breaks the marriage covenant.¹⁰⁴ I would argue that an unrepentant husband's abuse is at least grounds for divorce based on the biblical passages noted in the previous paragraph about the propriety of fleeing avoidable abuse.

It is tragically ironic that Paul's submission command to wives in Eph 5:24 has often been used against wives to condone or justify harsh and abusive behavior by husbands. The focus in this paragraph (quantitatively and qualitatively) is overwhelmingly on husbands. In Eph 5:21-33, Paul uses a mere forty-seven words to admonish wives, but one hundred and forty-three words to admonish husbands.¹⁰⁵ Even more importantly, Paul raises the bar for husbands as high as it could possibly be raised by commanding them to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. This is surely the loftiest, most demanding command given to husbands in the entire Bible. But Paul does not leave the reader simply with a sweeping and lofty *imitatio Christi* injunction. He elaborates on several specifics of Christ's costly sacrifice for the church and then in 5:28-29 again admonishes husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and again elaborates on the application. Paul weaves a rich metaphor into this command by instructing husbands to love their wives as their own bodies, tenderly nourishing and cherishing them just as Christ tenderly cares for and nourishes his body the church. Paul then finishes

¹⁰³David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 275.

¹⁰⁴Craig Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 105-9; Paul Engle and Mark Strauss, eds., *Remarriage After Divorce in Today's Church: 3 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 103-36.

¹⁰⁵Kurt Aland, ed., *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.; New York: United Bible Society, 1998).

this paragraph by noting the mysterious sacred “one flesh” intimacy of marriage which pictures Christ’s union with the church. Thus, if Eph 5:24 is understood in its context, selfish mistreatment of wives by husbands is utterly precluded. In fact, this passage makes such selfish manipulations by dominating husbands a slanderous assault on Christ for marriage is to be a most winsome picture to the world of Christ’s love and care for his bride.

IV. CONCLUSION

Non-egalitarian evangelicals have widely varied models of marital submission, from complete submission with no qualification to single qualification submission to multiple qualification submission. I have asserted that while Scripture does call wives to submit to their husbands, marriage is an intimate one-flesh union between two equals. Hence, there should be very few times in a healthy marriage that a couple is at loggerheads and the husband takes responsibility for the final decision and his wife submits to him (voluntarily yields to his leadership). We are in a fallen world and obedience to Christ demands that our allegiance and obedience to all earthly powers be carefully clarified. Otherwise, in our zeal to obey Scripture we will fail to honor our only true Lord, and we will allow wives and vulnerable children to suffer what God never intended them to suffer.