



The “Why” Behind God Telling Wives to Submit to their Husbands in Marriage

Description



I’ve rarely met a Christian woman who didn’t wonder

“why” on the question of submission in marriage. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands, but rarely given a good reason beyond “because God said so”. Granted, that’s the best reason to do anything, but it helps to know why scripture says this.

We’re going to look at the five most important reasons why in this article. (*Reasons are ordered from weakest to strongest.*)

(*Note: submission is often taught without highlighting how crucial a woman’s function is in the home, which has a net effect of devaluing women. My article: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) should provide a balanced perspective on that.*)

Reason #1: Biology

Admittedly, this is the weakest reason.

In the previous article in this marriage series ([Gender Differences and the Biology of Leadership](#)) we went through the biological differences that God hard-wired into men and women. As it turns out, these differences that God hard-wired into our DNA make men far more effective leaders than women. Details in the article.

Reason #2: When Women aren't in submission, Society Falls Apart

The first article in this series is entitled [How Getting Marriage ~Wrong Destroyed Every Great Civilization in World History](#). In it, we saw how societies are destroyed by fatherless homes. (*A ~1% increase in fatherless homes leads to a ~3% increase in violent crime; source in the article.*) In turn, fatherless homes are caused by divorce and unwed mothers. Divorce and unwed mothers **always** accompany equality for women; always. 100% of the time. Equality of course means there's no submission.

Therefore, the natural result of equality for women (*no submission*) is the inevitable destruction of any great civilization.

Reason #3: Why did God create women?

You know the story: there wasn't a suitable "helper" among the animals, so God made woman out of Adam's rib. But notice the "why":

Genesis 2:18

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

The reason God gives for creating woman is that it was "not good for man to be alone". Think about that. Really think about that. According to this verse, *God created woman in response to the needs of man*. Seriously. Read the verse (or the whole passage) again if you don't believe me.

God created woman for man.

Lest you think I'm making this up, Paul makes this point crystal clear.

1 Corinthians 11:8-9

8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;

9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

(Note: I have an article titled [Does 1 Corinthians 11 Require Women To Wear Head Coverings?](#) which goes into great detail on this passage. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is the Bible's most complete treatise on authority between the genders, and the article explains it thoroughly.)

In Genesis, God provides a reason that He created woman: God created woman so man wouldn't be alone. To be blunt, the reason women exist is for men; to help them and make sure they aren't

alone. That's why God said He created them.

Men were created for God; women were created for God and man.

Again, Paul makes it crystal clear that this is the reason for authority in marriage:

1 Corinthians 11:9-10

9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but **woman for the man's sake**.

10 **Therefore** the woman **ought** to have authority on her head, because of the angels.

(Note: many translations add a symbol of in front of the word authority. However, it has no basis in the Greek, and is added for "ahem" clarity. The NASB indicates this by italicizing it.)

The word translated "ought" in that passage is the Greek word $\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\gamma\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ (opheilō) (opheilō). "Ought" isn't a bad translation, but it doesn't capture the full force of the Greek. I'll copy/paste from the lexicon. (emphasis added)

3784 *opheilō* (a primitive verb, NAS dictionary) "to owe, be indebted, i.e. **obliged to rectify a debt** ("ought").

3784 /*opheilō* ("owe") refers to being **morally obligated** (or **legally required**) to meet an **obligation**, i.e. to pay off a **legitimate debt**.

[3784 (*opheilō*) originally belonged to the *legal* sphere; it expressed initially one's legal and economic, and then later **one's moral, duties and responsibilities to the gods and to men, or to their sacrosanct regulations**. . . . *opheilō* expresses human and ethical responsibility in the NT (DNTT, 2, 662.663).]

As you can see, it refers to a legitimate debt that someone owes. Here's the verse with that understanding added.

1 Corinthians 11:9-10

9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

10 Therefore the woman **is morally obligated** to have authority on her head, because of the angels.

The Bible says women have a moral obligation to be under (a *man's*) authority because woman was created for man. God created women to help men and make sure they aren't alone according to scripture. God designed women specifically for that purpose. Without man, there would've been no need to create a helper to make sure that he wasn't alone.

Thereâ€™s a very real sense where women owe their existence to men because God created women to help men.

Now, God is an artist and he doesnâ€™t do things halfway. The helper He created is amazing and crucial for the role God gave her. (See my article: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very! for more information.](#)) However, she was still created by God for a specific job.

Please follow the logic:

- God created women to help man, which requires man to be in authority over woman. (*otherwise heâ€™s helping her, not she helping him.*)
- Because God created women to help man, women have a moral obligation to be under a manâ€™s authority because God created them for that role. (*Just as God said through Paul.*)

And this was true in the first **pre-sin** marriage.

This is not the result of sin in the world. God made Eve before there was sin. He created her for Adam before the fall. Remember that according to 1 Corinthians 11:9-10, Godâ€™s created order established authority and submission in marriage. It wasnâ€™t the snakeâ€™s deception, Eveâ€™s gullibility, or Adamâ€™s passivity that led to this via sin.

This was God.

All God.

100% Him.

It was part of Godâ€™s sovereign plan that women were created for a specific purpose, and owing a debt to fulfill that role God because He created women. God further ordained that this debt (to Him primarily) would be paid by her submitting to and helping a man because thatâ€™s the role that God created women to fulfill. Iâ€™m sorry if you donâ€™t like this, but thatâ€™s the way God set up the world. You can yell at Him for it, but I donâ€™t expect Heâ€™ll change His mind.

Isaiah 45:9

9 "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker" An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! **Will the clay say to the potter, "What are you doing?" Or the thing you are making say, "He has no hands?"**

Romans 9:20

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? **The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?**

Itâ€™s crucial to understand this because without it the rest doesnâ€™t make sense. This is (part of) the "why" for marital submission. Without the why, the rest seems rather strange. With the why, it makes sense.

Q: Why does a wife have to submit to her husband?

A: Because women were made for men (to help them) and thus owe God a debt to fulfill the role that God created her for, and that role requires her being under her husband's authority

It's that simple.

To be clear, this does **NOT** give men the right to mistreat their wives. God gets so upset at men who mistreat their wives that He doesn't even listen to their prayers.

1 Peter 3:7

7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, **so that your prayers will not be hindered.**

The Greek word there for hindered is ἀκόσμητος (egkopt³) it means *properly, cut into (like blocking off a road)*. God will ignore your prayers if you mistreat your wife and He will hold you accountable if you do so. Ever. We'll talk more about this in the 8th article in this series.

Regardless:

Women were made for men (to help them) and that's (part of) why God commanded wives to submit to their husbands: so they could fulfill that role.

Obedying God is always the best option and we've already seen the devastating cultural consequences of ignoring His instruction. But there's actually more to it than just women being made for men. We'll look at that after a short addendum.

Addendum: It's husbands and wives specifically, not men and women generally

There is no place in the Bible where women in general are commanded to submit to men in general. None. We'll talk about daughters obeying fathers in [the 5th article of this marriage series](#), and of course the topic of this series is husbands and wives in marriage. However, it's **very** important to understand the following: **ladies: if a man isn't your father or husband, you do not have to submit to him just because you're a woman.**

Period.

Full stop.

A woman might have to submit to an authority figure, but that's because she's an authority figure and not because she's a woman. A man would have to submit as well. Again I repeat: **unless a man is her father (if never married) or husband, a woman does not have to submit to a**

man.

There isn't a single scripture that indicates that she should.

Because there isn't a single scripture that says women in general should submit to men in general, saying that's the case is adding to God's commands. If you think that's a good idea, I suggest you read the last few verses of Revelation 22.

Reason #3a Women weren't only made for men, they were made from men.

This is basically an addendum to reason #3.

Genesis 2:21-22

21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then **He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.**

22 **The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.**

Every man and woman ever born had input from both parents. (*Even Jesus had a Holy Spirit conception, so there's input from The Father.*) However, the progenitors of the human race "Adam and Eve" were different. Adam had **no part** of his beginning in woman; instead, God formed him entirely out of the dust/earth. Conversely, Eve had **all** of her beginning from man because she was made entirely from Adam's rib.

Lest you think I'm wrong, here's God's opinion through Paul.

1 Corinthians 11:8-9

8 For **man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;**

9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

God **chose** to make woman from man.

Think about that.

Really think about it. God could've created woman concurrently with man, or formed her from the dust of the ground like He did with Adam. God could've "and I'm sure it occurred to Him (*being all knowing*)" but He didn't do that. Instead, He **chose** to make woman for man, and **chose** to make woman from man.

God created women *for men* and *from men*. Thereâ€™s a very real sense where part of the submission in marriage is because woman came from man. In the first (*pre-sin*) marriage, the woman was originally â€œ and *literally* â€œ a part of the man. She was once a part of him thatâ€™s now walking around.

Could that have something to do with submission in marriage?

I think so.

(As we saw in [the first article](#), itâ€™s only when women stray out from under the position of an â€œappendage to the male estateâ€œ that society destroys itself. Coincidenceâ€™?)

But thereâ€™s yet more.

Reason #4: Itâ€™s (Part of) How Women Bear the Image of God

To unpack this, we need to start by asking: Why was mankind created?

Letâ€™s take a look:

Isaiah 43:6-7

6 â€œI will say to the north, â€œGive them up!â€œ And to the south, â€œDo not hold them back.â€œ Bring **My sons from afar and My daughters** from the ends of the earth,

7 Everyone who is called by My name, and **whom I have created for My glory**, whom I have formed, even whom I have made.â€œ

Men and women both were created for Godâ€™s glory. That shouldnâ€™t be groundbreaking, but the question then is: â€œHow do we glorify God?â€œ

Again, letâ€™s look:

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, â€œLet Us make man in Our **image**, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.â€œ

27 God created man in His own **image**, in the **image** of God He created him; **male and female** He created them.

Iâ€™m sure youâ€™ve heard the saying â€œimitation is the highest form of praiseâ€œ. To make a long story short, thatâ€™s how mankind glorifies God. Just by existing, we bring God some glory. However, God is most glorified when we imitate Him. Mankind imitates the character of his creator, and through this imitation, mankind brings glory and honor to God.

Jesus once said, "Therefore be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect". All throughout the Bible, we are told to imitate God and follow His commandments. By doing so, we bring glory to God.

If *both* men and women are made in the image of God, why is God always portrayed as masculine?

I recently published an article entitled: [Is God Male, Female, or Neither/Both? \(What are God's pronouns?\)](#) In it, I show that God always self-identifies as masculine 100% of the time. Both men and women are made in the image of God, but God Himself always identifies as masculine, even in the original language.

(And no, the Holy Spirit isn't feminine in the Old Testament. The people who propagate that myth simply don't understand the Hebrew language. Details/explanation in the article.)

Part of how women bear the image of God is through submission

(Note: just to be clear, I'm not about to make an ESS/EFS argument in this section, nor do I hold that position.)

Scripture links a wife's submission to her husband with Christ's submission to The Father.

1 Corinthians 11:3

3 But I want you to understand that **Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.**

Do you know what that means?

If you devalue a woman submitting to her husband in marriage, you devalue Christ submitting to the Father and men submitting to Christ.

Yup, it's that serious.

Read the passage again and you'll see that all three are linked together. Women submit to men, (*wives to husbands, never-married daughters to their fathers*) and men submit to Christ, and Christ submits to The Father. There's a clear order established in that passage, and other passages add children submitting to their parents.

Notice the pattern God established:

- Children submit to their parents (*man and woman*)
- Woman submit to man
- Man submit to Christ

- Christ submits to The Father

However, here's what egalitarian Christianity says:

- Children submit to parents (*men and women*)
- Woman ~~submits~~ **is exactly equal to** man



Hmm, "one of these things is not like the others; one of these

things just doesn't belong!"

As we've already seen ([in the first article of this series](#)), society **literally** falls apart when you ignore the hierarchy that God decreed. Ignoring God's commands doesn't work; it never has, it never will.

Again, **if you devalue women submitting to men, you also devalue Jesus submitting to The Father.**

Robbing women of submission is robbing them of a chance to reflect the glory of God Christ and bear His image by imitating Christ.

Further, it denies them the ability to fulfill the purpose they were created for, and denies them the ability to repay the debt that God said they come into the world having. I will concede that few Christian women see it this way though.

Reason #5: Because God Said So

I haven't proven this fact Biblically yet (*that's the next two articles in the series*). However, assuming it's true "and it is" then this should be all the reason anyone needs.

Conclusion

Here are the "whys" of submission:

1. Men are biologically better suited to leading and making leadership decisions ([Proof in this article](#))
2. Society falls apart when women don't submit to their husbands ([Proof in this article](#))
3. **Woman was created for man, to help him, and thus they owe God a "debt" to fulfill the role they were created for, which requires a woman obeying her husband**
 - o Women were created *from* men
4. Women reflect the image of God by submitting to men (*initially their father, then later their husband*) in the same way that Christ submits to the Father
5. Because God said so

Next, we'll look at the New Testament verses that teach [authority and submission in marriage](#). In [the article after that](#), we'll look at some more biblical context for the position of women, socially and politically speaking.

However, I do recommend that you also read my article: [Does 1 Corinthians 11 Require Women To Wear "Head Coverings"](#). It further unpacks 1 Corinthians 11 and provides more context, since that passage is the Bible's most complete treatise on authority in marriage (*once properly understood*).

Marriage Series Index:

- a. [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) (*This article was written later, but serves as an excellent, balanced intro to gender roles in marriage. I highly recommend reading this article before the others.*)
1. [How Getting Marriage 'Wrong' Destroyed Every Great Civilization in World History](#)
2. [Gender Differences and the Biology of leadership](#)
3. [The "Why" Behind God Telling Wives to Submit to their Husbands in Marriage](#)
 - a. [Does 1 Corinthians 11 Require Women To Wear "Head Coverings"](#)
4. [The Bible on Authority & Submission in Marriage](#)
5. [Does God View Women as the \(Social/Political\) Equals of Men?](#)
6. [Biblically, What's the Role of Women in Society and Marriage?](#)
7. [Gender and Attraction: What Men vs Women REALLY Want](#)
8. [Biblically, What's the Role of Men in Society and Marriage? \(still writing it...\)](#)
9. [Is Polygamy \(Polygyny\) Biblical? Does God Allow it?](#)
10. Follow up articles coming...
 - o Appendix A: [Biblical Reasons for Divorce, When Remarriage is Allowed, and How Adultery Figures In](#)