

Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

6 Hostile Submission

In our study of leadership and submission in the family we are currently looking at various types of men who don't lead and women who don't follow. Our purpose here is to recognize and overcome our own flaws and to help our spouses to become how God intended them to be. During the last two weeks we have talked about the passive, withdrawn husband – a man, who doesn't accept his responsibilities as leader of the family because he lacks confidence.

The type of woman we want to study today is to a certain extent similar. It is the woman, who has a low self-esteem. But this time, it affects the one who is not supposed to be the leading partner but to be submissive. So the effects are different and often less visible to the outside. We're talking about the woman who has given up her identity after she married; the woman who doesn't believe that she can remain herself because she is married, and therefore hides her real thoughts, desires, and personality. She does what her husband says – or what she *believes* he expects – without letting him know whether she agrees with him or not. To her, this is what the word of God demands of her – full submission to her husband.

What is wrong with that? some of you may ask. Isn't that what the Bible says? Doesn't **Ephesians 5:22** say

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

So aren't wives expected to obey their husbands without complaining?

6.1 What is submission?

Over many centuries that has been the most common interpretation of this verse. But recall our very first lesson. *What actually is submission?* And what is it not?

ACTIVE PHASE!!

<i>true submission</i>	<i>false submission</i>
under his authority	
a deliberate act	blind obedience
equal in value	diminishing yourself (assistant)
creative, supporting	giving up own identity ("mother")
shared responsibility	husband has full responsibility

1. True submission is a deliberate act. It is your own choice to submit, not something that is forced upon you. Read **Philippians 2:6–8**

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But made himself nothing, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

This passage talks about Jesus. Did anybody force him to go to the cross or did he do it out of his own will?

Jesus became obedient to God although he was equal to him. He decided to do so out of his own will. He could have done differently, but then we all would have been lost. So he knew what he was doing and why.

Philippians 2:5 tells us that our attitude should be the same. If we submit to each other, we do so as equal partners and out of our own choice.

By the way, let us keep in mind that **Ephesians 5:21** says

Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for God.

So it is quite clear that the next verse does not make the husband superior to the wife.

2. It is important that we do not give up our own identity when we submit. *We* are the ones who act, so we should carefully think through to what extent we follow the desires of our spouse. We should not just “obey blindly”, because we are still responsible for our own actions.

Blind obedience can be very dangerous. People who murdered Jews during the Nazi times later tried to excuse their actions by saying that they had no choice but to obey. They tried to deny the responsibility for their own actions by referring to the need for obedience.

This is a very extreme example, but I hope it makes clear that you are ALWAYS responsible for your own actions. Others may be guilty of issuing evil commands but the only one who decides to follow or not are YOU.

In the German Army this principle is now one of the first things you have to learn. Even in the army you have a duty for disobedience in certain situations. They have learned their lesson from the past and we should learn from it as well.

So, the consequences of submission often appear to be the same as obedience. But the difference lies in the motives. It doesn't count *what* you do, but *why* you do this. Have you noticed that a marriage is very sensitive to the motives of actions? Have you ever noticed that your husband reacts somewhat strange, although you do exactly what he wants – just because he senses that your motive for following is not love but something else?

Unfortunately in many families – particularly among Christian couples – submission is rather a habit than a deliberate act of love. Quite a few women “obey” their husbands without being convinced about this. To them, this is the role God has given them. Often, they do not agree at all to their husband’s decisions, but they follow them anyway without disputing them. To some extent, they do not view themselves as equal and they are not really happy about it. They have the impression that they are not really free to act as they think it best. But they are afraid of expressing this openly – either because they fear that their husbands would react badly to that or because they fear that this would be rebellion against God’s word.

Often, this kind of submission leads to a lot of tension in the family, because the wife does not submit out of her own choice. As a consequence, she does not feel responsible for her actions and, even worse, she often does not like what she has to do. Because of the latter, we speak of *hostile submission* in this case.

6.2 Hostile Submission

The Bible gives us an excellent example of such a woman – it is one of David’s wives – Abigail – whom we meet in **1.Samuel 25**.

At that time, Abigail was married to a man named Nabal. In Verse 3 we read that she was beautiful and intelligent while her husband was not the type of man that you would like to be around. David and his men had been living in the same area for quite a while and they had to a certain extent protected Nabal’s herds. Now as the sheep-shearing time comes, David asks Nabal to give him something in return but Nabal refuses in a very rude way. When Abigail hears about this, she secretly takes a lot of food and – without telling her husband – goes out to meet David. Now let us read Verses 23–28.

And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

Q: So, what kind of woman do you think Abigail was? ACTIVE PHASE!!

At a first glance we notice that she is humble and, as the King James Version says, “a woman of good understanding”. She did all she could to undo the rude behavior of her husband. So outwardly, she displayed a very attractive character and it is no wonder that David married her after Nabal died (Verse 39). But was she a good wife to her husband who certainly had many flaws?

Well, you might say that she saved his life, because David would surely have killed him. But let us look a little closer at what she does and says, we find out that this says quite a lot about her personality and her marriage. ACTIVE PHASE!!

Negative self image: Let us begin with her self image. ACTIVE PHASE!!

Women had a very low status at that time and Abigail surely viewed herself as an inferior being. This becomes very clear in her whole attitude toward David. But this view of herself had little to do with her real qualities, because she was intelligent and beautiful.

Many women today have a negative self-image although they are attractive and competent in many respects. But they focus too much on what they lack instead on the gifts God has given them. So they constantly suffer from a *feeling of inferiority* that has nothing to do with reality.

Habit to blame herself: Let us look at Verses 23–25. Abigail certainly knows that she was not responsible for Nabal’s stupid actions (25) but she does take the blame on herself.

Women with a low self-esteem often do that. They view themselves as the focus of attention, but in a negative way. If something bad happens, they believe that something they did must have been the cause. Isn’t that strange? Despite a feeling of inferiority they view themselves as the center of the world. Whatever happens, it has to do with them.

Largely, the focus is on the negative. Ten good things may happen but she picks the only one that is negative. That shapes her view of the past and of the future. Bad things are often anticipated because “*that is the way the world is*”. Strangely enough, they often experience more bad things than others, because their thoughts center so much around them. In today’s language such people are called **negaholic**. The only cure for them is to get a better grasp of reality – and to have it replace their twisted view of the world.

In **John 8:31–32** we read

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

We will come back to this later.

Martyrdom as a defensive weapon: If you look at the situation, you cannot fail to sympathize with Abigail. She had deserved far better than this terrible husband and she makes it clear how much she suffers.

Women with a low self-esteem often use this behavior as a protective weapon. Martyrdom and helplessness are intended to make others feel pity for them. Many men melt when confronted with this, so sometimes it seems to be the only way to attract attention.

But it also has the bad taste of manipulation in it so the reaction of others may sometimes be quite the the opposite of what should originally be achieved.

Marriage built by fear & distance . What about her marriage? **ACTIVE PHASE!!**

It is obvious that her relation to her husband wasn't very close anymore. Maybe it had never been but that is not really relevant. We see that she goes secretly around her husband, probably out of *fear*, because he was a rude man. And if you read how she speaks about him, you notice that she *certainly did not respect* him. He probably did not deserve much respect, but this is not a basis for a good marriage.

Making wide circles around your husband doesn't solve the problem. Yes, he may have quite a few flaws. But if you keep distance, then you deprive him of the last positive influence he might get and the marriage will become only worse.

Suppressed bitterness: It is quite obvious that Abigail did not feel much for her husband anymore. Instead, her feelings were bitterness and even hostility (Verse 25). But as she distanced herself more and more from Nabal, she suppressed her feelings towards him and simply went around him.

No one can live like this for a long time. So Abigail, like many people in such a situation, expresses her feelings to a stranger instead to her husband. It is obvious that this is not good for her marriage.

Yes, there is a time to seek counseling if you cannot communicate with your husband. But this is not the same as letting your feelings slip out to co-workers or even total strangers, because it puts an even greater distance between you and your husband. Besides, it makes you open to the temptation for an affair.

So we see that Abigail's attitude towards her husband was by no means positive. But it was not only a reaction to Nabal's behavior but mostly based on her view of the world and her low self-esteem.

Q: Do you think that changed after she married David?

Probably not, because her attitude had little to do with the circumstances. All too often we believe that changing the circumstances would solve the problem. Many women believe that life would be better, if they could only change her husband.

But this is an illusion. It is not the circumstances that need change but our attitude. We need to see the world from a godly perspective. Fortunately, that is what God is working on in us.

6.3 Emotional Profile of hostility in submission

Before we look at ways how to overcome hostility in submission let us try to give a more general characterization of women, who do not submit out of their own choice but because they feel pressed to it. In addition to the symptoms we have already seen in Abigail – how would you describe the emotional state of a such a woman?

ACTIVE PHASE!!

Feelings of inferiority: This is probably the most dominant symptom but also the one that is most difficult to discover because it is often hidden quite well. A person who feels equal in value submits only out of free choice or not at all. A person with a low self-esteem has much much more difficulties with saying no, so she often gives in without really believing that this is right.

A Victim mentality often goes hand in hand with that. In last Sunday's bulletin we had a nice description of this mentality. Let me read a few of the statements from that

1. *My future is determined by my past and my present.*
3. *Please make everything easy – I can't take it if things get too hard.*
4. *I can't help it: I am just addicted to grumbling, fault-finding and complaining*
7. *My life is so miserable*
 - . *My problems are too great*
9. *Everybody else is better off than I am*
8. *I don't get God's blessing because I am not worthy*

A victim cannot influence his own life. Everything is determined by somebody else or the circumstances. And usually he gets only the bad parts.

Martyrdom is a variation of that. Everybody should feel sorry for me. The hunger for love is stilled by others feeling pity, which really puts me into the center of attention.

A self-blame strategy often accompanies the feeling of inferiority. *If something bad happens, then something I did must have been the cause*, is the tape that is being played over and over again. Besides, self-blame is often used as protective measure. After all, If I blame myself, I won't be attacked anymore.

The overprotective mother is a variation of that. She protects her children even against rightful complaints by taking the responsibility (or blame) for their actions. Unfortunately this often leads to a lot of problems with discipline when the children grow up.

Negaholic: Focusing on the negative is a typical behavior of people with a low self-esteem and closely related to the victim mentality. Whatever happens during the day, it is the Negative that is remembered. When making plans for the future, the thoughts center about the things that may go wrong. Negaholics have difficulties to trust in God's promises because they are so contrary from their negative view of the world. Instead they need to build up a lot of worldly security, which seems more trustworthy than God's promises.

I am talking about feelings here, not about abstract knowledge, but it is the feeling that dominates the thinking in this case.

Workaholic: Another way of proving ones worth in order to get out of a feeling of inferiority is being busy all the time. *Each work I do increases my worth a little, so the more I do, the more I am worth*, is the tape that plays. These people find it difficult to take a rest and to accept the fact that God loves them even if they work less.

Perfectionist: To many people one way to get out of a feeling of inferiority is to aim at perfection in everything they do. Any sign of imperfection shows that they are still not good enough. So they are constantly striving for a higher standard and pay attention to the slightest detail. This has obviously a lot of positive effects, but it costs an incredible amount of energy. Since perfection can never be achieved they are constantly busy and under stress (but for different reasons than the workaholic).

They will find it difficult to accept that God loves them even if they are not perfect, and they also find it difficult to accept people who chose to live at a much lower degree of perfection.

Recognizing these symptoms will help us to identify whether we we have problems with deliberate submission and true humility. Keep in mind that, although we're mostly talking about women here, most of these symptoms also apply to men who have difficulty with **Ephesians 5:21**.

6.4 How to overcome hostility in submission?

All these symptoms point to a problem with our self-esteem or a feeling of inferiority. Overcoming these problems will therefore make us free to be truly submissive. And the key for that is *changing the basis for our convictions*.

How do you feel about yourself and why? Do you compare yourselves with others (women like to do that) who are younger, richer, more beautiful, clothed better, more intelligent, more spiritual ... and feel bad about that? How does that, what you feel relate to what God says about you?

Often we base our convictions more on our immediate feelings than on God's truth. But listening to our – often false – beliefs can be very misleading and depressing. If instead we learn to base our convictions on truth, we will be able to overcome a low self-esteem and to submit without feeling pressed to it. In **John 8:31–32** we read

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

So knowing, what God says about us, will make us free. So what exactly does he say about you? **ACTIVE PHASE!!**

- *You are loved by God.* **1.John 4:7–8** tells us

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not does not know God; for God is love.

Jeremia 31:3 says

I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you.

We belong to a God who loves us. You can accept this as a fact or – even as a Christian – choose to believe your circumstances clearly say that God does not love you. Which of the two is closer to reality?

- *God considers you valuable* and wonderfully made. We talked about that 2 weeks ago (**Psalms 139:14**)

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

- *You are accepted by God, so you are good.* **Hebrews 4:13–16** says

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We cannot fool God. He sees us as we really are. He knows every evil thought that goes to our minds, every bad thing we did and every good deed that we did not do. But he still accepts us, because he can relate to our feelings. He forgives us because we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He wants us to have fellowship with him, because he has a vision for our future. He does not see our sins anymore but the good that is going to become out of us. In his eyes, we are already perfect – there is no reason for feelings of inferiority.

Some people still have trouble with accepting this emotionally. If you do, let me ask you a provocative question: *How high do you set your own standards?* Are they higher than God’s standards for acceptance? How well do people – including yourself – have to perform to be acceptable?

Think about this. Jesus attacked the pharisees for exactly that reason. Their standards were higher than God’s. That’s why they had all these religious laws that had little or nothing to do with God’s word. They built a fence around the spirit of the word and made it so high, that no one could keep it. No wonder that all the people felt so guilt-laden.

Think about it! You may have to lower your standards for accepting others and yourself, instead of running after an ideal that nobody can reach.

6.5 Daily habits to cultivate

These are the facts that we find in God’s word. Now it is easy to understand them mentally and to agree when you hear me “preach”. You may even repeat them to anybody else who asks you about them. But – how can you make these facts come to life? How can you adjust your feelings to what you know to be true?

Here are a few suggestions that make it easier.

1. *Cultivate truth in daily living.* The more you are in contact with scripture, the more scripture will affect your thinking. If you spend little time with God’s word, your feelings will always dominate. If you have God’s word all around you, you will eventually think in the same way.

So, spend enough time with God day by day – focus on passages like the above, which tell how high God values you. And eventually you will feel that these passages are meant for you specifically.

2. *Learn to say no to others.* Saying yes to God’s truth means being able to say no to others. How can you learn to make submission a deliberate act of love, if you do everything that others expect from you? People who can’t say no, are constantly under pressure and – after a while – don’t like at all what they are doing. So, occasionally you *must* say no instead of taking more and more burdens on yourself. Then you will experience that you can submit joyfully, when you decide to do so.

And by the way – you won't lose any friends because of that. They will love you no less than before, probably even more. Those who don't – these are the people you don't need to have as friends. It's a bit more tricky at home sometimes, but even there you have to learn to say no.

3. *Learn to say no to yourself.* This is often even more difficult because many people with a low self-esteem feel some kind of void in themselves. They need approval from others to fill that void or have to give themselves little rewards to feel better. This can become an addiction: the little rewards – food, drinks, cigarettes (probably not here), overactivity, shopping – become necessary to deaden the pain. While in some cases the addiction is easy to recognize, there are many less obvious addictions, because our society tolerates them. I am still shocked by the number of excessively overweight people here in the US. Even our churches often find this acceptable – because it is neither smoking nor alcohol – but overeating and other addictions do not at all glorify God. In fact, I would say it is no better than getting drunk.

Proverbs 23:20:

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves with meat.
For drunkards and gluttons become poor.

So, getting what you want doesn't fill the void – it just makes it worse. You need more and more to get satisfied. And to yourself and the outside world you become less and less attractive.

So it is time to break with these habits and to say no to yourself, no to your feelings and desires. You need to experience that *you* are in control, not your feelings. As far as I understand it, our weigh-down workshops take exactly this approach: you don't focus on the object of your desire, but on the fact that you don't need them, to feel loved.

So the important thing is – saying no to your desires and filling the gap with God's love makes you free – and you will actually feel much better afterwards.

These are three simple steps which will be very successful when you really begin to take them.

By the way, a husband can support your wife in her struggle for a better self-esteem. Show her that you accept her fully as she is right now – even if she can still improve a few things. Tell her how much you love her and why. What is it that makes her attractive and lovable. She needs to know, because she doesn't see that. Encourage her to discover her strengths.

It pays off! The greater her self-esteem will be, the more energy she will have to take care of your needs – out of her own desire.