

Submitting to God in Everything

True Spiritual Authority operates in an environment of Godly wisdom that releases women to fulfill their callings in every area of life.

The old saying is true: “A woman’s place is in the home.” It’s just not her only place.

Many women today bristle when they hear that old axiom. They get defensive when they hear the word “submission” or the term “spiritual authority.” A big reason, no doubt, is that many women have experienced abuse in their homes—both emotionally and physically—under the banner of “submission.”

Churches often offer little support. I’ve heard horror stories of women who told their pastors about the abuse in their homes and were counseled, “Submit to your husband’s demands, and God will make everything all right.” Other women, confident of God’s call on their lives, have shared with their leaders their desire to be involved in ministry outside the home, only to leave the church office feeling belittled and useless.

Though the world has opened doors of opportunity for women in the workplace, the church prejudicially denies them a place of authority. But it is a public demonstration of ignorance for a church to refuse women a platform for preaching, teaching or prophesying in a public meeting simply because men are present. Have we regressed 2,000 years to the point of being surprised that Jesus spoke to women? Must we search out the role of every woman in the Bible to prove there is neither male nor female in Christ?

UNDER AUTHORITY Absolutely, women must be under spiritual authority. But so must men. In fact, according to God’s Word, everyone must be under the authority of someone—Christ to God,

man to Christ, wife to husband, children to parents, servant to master. Authority is God's plan of safety for every one of His children. And according to Hebrews 13:17, anyone who abuses that authority will have to give an answer to the Ultimate Authority!

Ephesians 5:22-24 says: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (NKJV).

Notice, this passage does not support male dominance over female or even a husband's domination over his wife. Rather, it is a description of God's chain of command. And the truth is, there would be little or no problem with this chain if it were not broken! Men who are not submitted to Christ in all things but who expect total submission of their wives to themselves are operating under a broken chain of authority. Likewise, women who refuse to submit to their husbands have broken God's chain.

"But my husband isn't really submitted to Christ," some women say. "That means I'm free to bypass his judgment and deal directly with God." Not so fast! It's true that some husbands attempt to use their positional authority to press their wives to violate the Word of God. But these are the more extreme cases.

And even in such a case, the wife must not consider herself free from the need to submit. Rather, she must turn to her spiritual authority—her pastor—who hopefully will be able to help both husband and wife understand the will of God.

It takes great faith for a woman to submit to someone who is less spiritually mature than she is. But faith says, "By my submission, I open the door for the Lord to work in the one to whom I'm submitting."

Unfortunately, more than a few women have given in to the delusion that since they are more spiritual than their husbands (and sometimes even their pastors), they are relieved of the need to submit. These women often find comfort in the company of other women who are in similar situations, not realizing that they are in danger of becoming an unprotected entity unto themselves, making their minds vulnerable to the enemy's input.

Sadly, it is not uncommon to hear of a woman in full-time ministry leaving her husband and children to fend for themselves while she goes off to fulfill a call from God. Now, I certainly understand the inner burning that accompanies a specific ministry calling. I understand how frustrating it can be to try to ignore that call because people think it's not an acceptable pursuit for a woman. And I understand the confusion that accompanies a woman's attempts to disengage herself from other responsibilities in order to prepare for ministry.

I understand—because I've experienced them all.

HEADLONG INTO DESTRUCTION As a young woman, my own prejudices against women preachers kept me from wanting to preach—but not from the call to do so. Even when I attended Bible school, I had no thought that I was there to prepare for full-time ministry. I didn't want even to marry a minister!

My grandfather, my father and three of my four brothers were ministers, and I grew up seeing the hurts caused by people's demands on their leaders. I also heard all the jokes about women preachers and learned early on that the only women who were respected in ministry were those on the mission field.

After leaving school and entering the business world, I married a military man. I felt safely removed from the call to minister and settled into my own plans for a normal, happy life. It was not until I was about to give birth to my firstborn that I realized how far I'd strayed from the Lord. I

hadn't been reading the Word or attending church, and I had little interest in the things of God.

The sudden awareness that I was about to become responsible for raising a child knocked me back to my senses. My parents had dedicated me to the Lord when I was young; what would happen if I didn't do the same for my baby? Besides, I had no confidence that I would be able to make proper decisions without the wisdom of God.

I determined at that point to renew my commitment to Christ. Because my husband was overseas with the Marines, I had a lot of time to seek the Lord. I got involved in church activities and renewed my acquaintance with Christian friends. When my husband returned home, nothing about home was familiar to him. He now had a daughter and a very different wife.

With perhaps the right intentions but not an ounce of wisdom, I laid down the new rules. I explained to my husband the things he could no longer do in my house and the things I would expect him to do. I became more and more "religious," convinced that I was doing the right thing by "taking a stand." Occasionally he attended church with me, but more and more, he became certain that being a Christian was not something he was interested in.

We were under the same roof but living two very different lives. Our efforts to find areas of mutual interest—things that weren't offensive to me or boring to him—became increasingly difficult. It doesn't take the mind of a nuclear scientist to predict the outcome. Feeling unfulfilled in his marriage, my husband began looking elsewhere for satisfaction.

During that time, I remained stubbornly certain that God was in the process of separating me unto Himself. And unfortunately, the leaders in my church confirmed the "righteousness" of my thoughts and actions. Finally, my husband left to find a woman he could understand, and I found

myself raising two children on my own. I was now in the position of authority I'd wrongfully assumed much earlier: head of the household.

Because I had believed that I was exempt from submission because I was a believer and my husband was not, I had fallen headlong into the destruction of my marriage. The wise man said it well: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

THE LORD'S TIMING But what about the call to minister I'd received years before? Was it still there? Was I supposed to fulfill it now and ignore the fact that I was raising two children on my own? The more I prayed and drew close to Jesus in those days, the more aware I was that the call on my life remained. But I also began to understand something else: I couldn't fulfill that calling; only God could!

What I could do was let Him have His way in me day by day. I could evangelize and minister to my family, exercise faith, build hope, and prophesy to myself the Word of the Lord. God's timing, I realized, is as important as His call.

In the years that followed, I learned to find my fulfillment in the Lord. I also learned to enjoy my children rather than seeing them as obstacles or responsibilities.

At church, as the anointing made a place for me, my opportunities for ministry increased. I taught Sunday school, led choirs, organized outings for the youth, and counseled men and women of all ages. I found that God gave me wisdom for every situation. Occasionally, the pastor would ask me to share from the pulpit, and I did. All the while I was making a living by doing probation work with needy youth.

It was years before I took a full-time position in the church, and even longer before I was given ministerial papers. I didn't begin a traveling ministry until my children were grown. And though I often felt that my years of rebellion had

caused me to take God's second best for my life, I was grateful to Him for using me at all.

Then one day the Lord showed me another important truth: With God, there are many second chances—but no secondary places. He had offered an easy way for me to fulfill my purpose; I chose the difficult way. Still, at the end of my days I will be able to say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" and "the crown of righteousness" will still be awarded to me. "And not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 7-8).

Dear woman of God, are you experiencing the frustration of wanting to preach, wanting to be more useful in the kingdom than you presently are? Do you feel called to ministry but have a spouse who rejects the idea, children who need you, financial obligations that must be met or other obstacles that block your way?

Be encouraged! While you are waiting and submitting, you are receiving a preparation that no seminary or Bible college can give you. In His time, you will know success and have the peace of knowing you did it His way.

Read a companion devotional.

Iverna Tompkins has preached and taught the Word of God for more than 30 years. One of the hallmarks of her ministry is a commitment to leadership training. She is a published author and mother of two.