



# T A B L E T A L K

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## The Battle of the Sexes and issues of Submission

Christian Relationships (Part 1)

by  
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Marriage and the Christian family captures the best, and sadly some of the worst, of experiences for the Christian. At its best, it is the joy and discovery of growing more into conformity with Jesus, and shaping young lives to be introduced, and ultimately to choose, and to follow the same Lord. All in all, young and older, seeking to love God and follow His commandments.

On the darker side, there is a downside, often seen in my law practice. Relationships deteriorate, motives twist and change, and children are caught in the vise of 'irreconcilable differences.' Christians can never do better than revisiting these contemporary questions within the inspiration of the Scriptures. To that end, the following observations are suggested, recognizing that everyone is in process on this marital pilgrimage.

### Stage One: Back to the Relational Blueprints

Adam, Eve and Satan meet under God's providence in the garden of Eden. For all the fault-finding, blaming, misconstruing of God's instruction, and the like — the consequences of disobedience and sin roll out. To Eve (and indirectly to Adam), God said "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16b).

For many years I taught this section of Scripture as some kind of a divine curse wherein the woman was physically or sexually attracted to her husband, yet his rulership over her repelled her, catching her in a divine push-pull judgment on woman. While that would be a curse of sorts, and it certainly matched some of life as we know it, it seemed out of context, particularly when studying the term "desire."

Approximately 15 years ago, Old Testament Christian scholars began to correct our thinking on this concept.

Looking at the occurrence of this word "desire" in a near context, in the Cain and Abel confrontation, the Lord warns about the adversary Sin, and cautions: "it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:7b).

The application to Adam and Eve is straightforward. Eve's desire to rule or dominate Adam will clash with his obligation and actions in ruling her. Hence, the first battle of the sexes. Not only does this match, also, life as we know it, but it is consistent with the Eden context and the judgment on Eve and Adam for their willful contempt against the clear instructions of the Creator. Because of sin, sadly, the marital battle lines are drawn.

### Stage Two: The Anecdote for Marital Conflict

Contrary to pop summaries offered about the Christian life by its critics, The New Testament and the Apostle Paul provide a wonderful anecdote for this marriage malady that catches both husband and wife in self-interests that damage relationships, applying equally to sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Within the context of careful living and giving thanks for everything, Paul writes: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Eph. 5:21).

God's anecdote for marital conflict is straightforward: two individuals, male and female, who choose to obey God (reverence or worship) rather than their base or first instincts to dominate or rule the other. In other words, when disputes or conflicts come, the Christian response, looking first to our allegiance to Christ, is to put our desires underneath or behind the desires of our spouse. It is illustrated by the simultaneous approach of two people to the same door and entrance, who say repeatedly to the other, "After you...no, after you...no, after you..."

This instruction is simple, but profound. It is God-motivated determination for the husband or wife to lift up the interests and desires of the other over themselves. This instruction precedes specific instructions to the husband to love his wife as her head, and the wife to respect her husband in submission (Eph. 5:22-23). The work of the flesh and consequence of the Evil One is for the husband to rely primarily on the hammer-of-headship, or for the wife to press first her interests and desires over her husband. Certainly, when relationships and marriages are in serious disrepair, this instruction needs to be supplemented by the whole counsel of God. Even so, the remedial starting point is always getting back to the principle of mutual submission of husband and wife out of worship of our Lord.

### Stage Three: The Beloved More Than the Battle

There is no sterile environment for beginning the marriage relationship in perfect objectivity, without the experiences and family contexts that color every Christian. Therefore, there is work for everyone in marriage, from the first day to the last.

The wise husband analyzes carefully his family background, the weakness adopted from his male role models (or absence of the same). He regularly asks for candor from those Christians that he trusts, and encouragement and accountability in making very sure that his marital conduct reflects much more of the submission of Christ to His Father's will than the domination of his will over his wife. This is his high road away from Satan's plan for his marriage.

Likewise, the wise wife similarly analyzes her background. Reacting out of personal pain or fear of feelings of neglect propels a wife into a role similar to Eve — which results in the conflict of wills wherein her interests are put ahead of God's expressed will. This protects this woman from the designs Satan has for her.

One of my favorite commercials is where a grimy mechanic, holding up an oil-clogged engine part, and reminding the viewer of the need for regular oil changes, states: "You can pay me now, or pay me later." I have often thought of that moral in relation to relationships. In relation to resolving conflicts, and focusing on obedience to God's instruction, a husband or wife can

choose to "pay now or pay later" — meaning that acts of mutual submission are irreplaceable parts of healthy Christian marriages, and avoid the deteriorating battle of the sexes that accompanies men and women who, following their ancient parents' lead, choose their interests over God's plan and the needs of their spouse.

Happily, this also avoids the law office appointment which leads to filing or defending in a petition citing irreconcilable differences between the offspring of Adam and Eve.

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