

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”
(Eph. 5:21)

Light from the Word

The Faithful Church-Submissive



Writings based on God's Word

The faithful church is based on love and obedience to the whole counsel of God's Word. These biblical principles were discussed in previous Light from the Word articles. We will now focus on the essential attribute of submissiveness on the part of each member of the body, so that it can grow stronger as a whole and bear much fruit to the honor and glory of God.

The faithful church consists of a group of believers who are committed to serving God and edifying one another. We are bound together in a living, God-ordained body whose success relies upon love-driven submission by each member. *“From whom (Christ) the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph.4:16).

Submission consists of yielding our own will or preferences with the understanding that there is a higher purpose to be attained. This purpose includes bringing glory to God by dwelling together in peace and unity, which also brings special blessings to the church: *“...live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (2 Cor. 13:11). Submission requires a bending of our will, and its true beauty is born of our devotion to God and to what He has called us to be. It is not submission if we comply only when we agree with what is asked.

Jesus has set the perfect example of submission. He said, *“I can of mine own self do nothing...because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me”* (John 5:30). The ultimate act of submission was when Christ laid down His life on our behalf. We see that His submission to God's plan for our salvation created an agonizing struggle for Him. He prayed earnestly, *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). His struggle arose from a pure, sinless heart which was facing the unthinkable burden of being separated from His Father because of our sin.

God understands how we as humans wrestle with our prideful self-will and how easy it is to justify what we think is

right. *“Every way of man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts”* (Prov. 21:2). A humble spirit will help us acknowledge our struggles with the carnal mind before the Lord and seek His grace for objective discernment. We will remember that we are to seek the welfare of our brother and the entire body of believers above our own. *“Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth (well-being)”* (1 Cor. 10:24). We probably will not be asked to lay down our life for another, but it can also be very difficult to give up our self-will. *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16).

There will always be differences of opinion among brethren on this earth regarding liberty and restraint in application of God's Word in various matters. (Rom. 14) Some things should be respectfully left to individual conscience and others require establishment of standards within the church which are based on biblical principles. When our faith rests on the foundation of Jesus Christ and our relationships within His body are based on selfless, Christ-like love, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will guide the church in these matters (John 16:13). In the pattern of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-29), humble servant leaders search the Scriptures and rely upon the Holy Spirit for direction; and as submissive brethren we receive their direction with joy. (Acts 15:30-31) That is a joy that springs from a humble recognition that we benefit from and vitally need loving direction from others as we walk with a limited understanding as individuals. (1 Pet. 5:5) This is made possible only by God's grace.

We are cautioned by the warning that no Scripture is of private (personal) interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20). We also recognize that if our motive for counsel is only to seek reinforcement of our views from those who agree with us, we are neglecting the safety of broader understanding. (Prov. 11:14)

If we become *“...wise in our own conceits (opinions)”* (Rom. 12:16), we will be unable to reason together and live in a peaceable, harmonious relationship within

the body. The Apostle Paul compares the marriage relationship to that of Christ and the church, His body. (Eph. 5:22-33) He begins this discourse with the exhortation: *“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God”* (Eph. 5:21). The fear of God causes us to take very seriously our marriage relationships as well as our responsibilities within the church. The fear of God should cause us to tremble when we consider that He hates *“putting away.”* (Mal. 2:16) As in marriage, there is a covenant-based oneness among the members of the body of Christ into which we are baptized. (1 Cor. 12:12-13) If we become influenced by the attitudes of the divorce culture of the world, our minds may begin to toy with the desire to escape the obligations we once vowed to fulfill. The concept *“irreconcilable differences”* has arisen from this divorce culture and is used by many to justify breaking the sacred marriage relationship. This same false reasoning is sometimes used to justify breaking the bonds of brotherly love within the church family. (1 Cor. 12:25) This concept has no scriptural basis. *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”* (Phil. 2:3). Nothing is impossible with God when His grace is applied and brethren are willing to make sincere effort to achieve the higher purpose (mission) God has established for His church. This includes spreading the Gospel message of salvation to the lost, nurturing the believers, preserving sound doctrine and offering loving deeds of service to our fellow human beings. Jesus prayed that the church would walk in the love and mind of Christ, enabling the world to know why He came. (John 17:23)

The faithful church will seek to practice submission as prescribed in the Word of God and exemplified by Christ. It will be known for its brotherly love, compassion for all, peace, and unity of spirit. In an atmosphere of love, trust and mutual respect, submission will not be a burden, but a privilege. Jesus said, *“...my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matt. 11:30).

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Pet. 3:8).