



How I Submit to My Wife

Why a feminist with a hairy chest

chose to take his beloved's last name

By Nicholas Rudolph Quient

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. . .”

(Philippians 2:1–4. NRSV)

“You know what, why don’t you take Allison’s last name?”

My mind instantly went back to the days of my youth, where I remembered that the very idea of doing such a thing would have gotten me kicked out of the youth group. Now there I was, in my mid-twenties, preparing for seminary and marriage, with a whole new outlook on life, and this little dilemma presented itself.

What was at stake in my last name? My parents, both of whom have journeyed a lot on the issue of women in ministry and mutuality in marriage, had brought me up to respect the person, not the name. I was never called an “Ahern,” though that was my last name. Indeed, my parents seemed quite keen on raising me to love and respect others in the context of who they were, regardless of status. My last name, in short, had nothing to do with who I was, before

others and before God. Character is what God desired, not my last name.

So, when a loved one presented the idea, in passing, I was struck by it. I had come a long way in my theology of gender, from my time at Ron Pierce's Theology of Gender course at Biola University, to reading Greek and starting seminary. But this was something new. My fiancée and I already practiced mutual submission on a daily basis, and when this issue came up, my response was natural and to the point: sure, why not?

Of course, in my evangelical subculture, things aren't always as natural or to the point as this. My parents were supportive, though it was pretty clear that they didn't agree. But after some time and conversation, we came to see eye-to-eye on the issue, as much as you can. Not everyone was as supportive. I got several

that the woman takes the man's last name, and that is that.

I recall my sentiment quite clearly: I will not be bullied about this. I'm 6 feet tall, bearded, a former swimmer and water polo player, moderately handsome (evidenced by the fact that Allison married me), and a lover of cigars and dark beer. I'm pretty manly (when I take off my shirt, small children point and say things about Bigfoot) and that was the first time I put my foot down on this issue.

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ meant that I wouldn't compromise my conviction, especially in light of the call to love and serve one another (Eph. 5:1–2). Growing up in a Christian subculture that prided itself on masculinity and not being feminine, I saw very little of the rest of Ephesians 5:25–29 in the

beautiful. I got to act like Jesus; what more incentive did I need?

Fast-forward several months, and my wife is working in a fast-paced and grueling sales job. One night while on a sales trip, the subject of the last name change came up with her non-Christian co-workers. Instantly, they asked, "Is this a religious thing?" Then, when Allison explained how I took her name (and wanted to, not being forced in any way), they were struck. When Allison and I went in for our marriage certificate and told the clerk about my last name change, the woman looked at me as if to ask, "you lose a bet?" A friend of mine told me that what I did was "[*expletive*] sweet." So, curiously, God has used this in some interesting ways.

In being married for just over two years, I can safely say that the most difficult

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emails about my choice, some harsher than others. Another loved one was very concerned that Allison was taking control of the relationship, and another intimated that I enjoy being sexually dominated. Of course, Allison and I, since we hadn't yet been wed, weren't having sex but the point was clear: my last name meant a lot to some people.

It boiled over one night where I was so angry that I nearly had a panic attack and found myself sitting on the living room floor with my loved ones, trying to keep myself from popping off at someone. My mother, to her credit, offered the suggestion that we hyphenate our last names. That issue wasn't on the table, and for good reason: the actions of others had pushed it off. Even if I wanted to hyphenate my last name (and I didn't), the issue was about my last name, and not my character. The issue was about the assumption

lives of the husbands I knew. With the exception of my father, very few men were willing to sacrifice for their wives in a way that brought the woman up to them. Very few were willing to follow Ephesians 5:21, 25–29, and submission was designated as a female thing. But in reading Scripture, everything I saw ran exactly counter to that claim, not the least of which was the example of Jesus (Phil. 2:5–11). He forsook his prior glory, and came down to our level, in order to bring us back up with him.

I saw mutual submission as *required* for marriage, and I believe that it was the strongest measure of what I could do: I give of myself to her, and I honor her, by esteeming her heritage, her culture, her family, by taking her last name. The example of Christ washing the disciple's feet indicated that this wasn't going to be easy. But as offering a model for how to act in marriage, I saw nothing more

aspect of our egalitarian marriage so far is the jointly amusing task of trying to "out submit" the other. When such a treat is framed in this way, I fail to understand why anyone wouldn't want to submit to his or her spouse.

So how do I submit to my wife? I live as Christ did, giving everything for her, serving her, taking her weaknesses as my own. I live for her, as I know she lives for me: in reverence for Christ, one to another, being of the same mind, doing nothing for selfish reasons, and living a wondrous mystery now disclosed (Eph. 5:32).



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