



The “S” Word

“Submission” has become a loaded word. Misused and misunderstood, submission is often rejected in mainstream culture, being equated with passiveness and weakness. Christians who grow up in and break free from controlling hierarchical communities also tend to struggle with submission after seeing it implemented abusively and unilaterally. As they come out of churches that twist and distort Scripture, many don’t know what to do with Paul’s teachings on the subject¹ and may find themselves skipping over challenging passages and texts when reading the Bible.

But as Christians, we do not have the option of “skipping over” certain parts of Scripture that we find difficult or uncomfortable. It is the word of God—all of it. If there is something in the Bible that bothers us, that is a call to dig *deeper*, to study *more*, not to avoid or dismiss it. Thankfully the Lord has called a host of good biblical scholars to write carefully and faithfully about difficult passages—not only on the issue of submission, but on many other hard questions as well. We have abundant resources at our fingertips.²

One of the central accusations in the debate between complementarians and egalitarians is that egalitarians “throw the Bible out” or “pick and choose” what part of Scripture we believe. But at CBE, the authority of Scripture is paramount.³ The Bible is the foundation of all that we believe; we have a responsibility to understand it correctly, to do good exegesis, and to uphold its teachings to the best of our ability. That is why we prefer the term “biblical equality” over other, perhaps more ambiguous terms; our belief does not stem from personal preference or cultural influence. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible repeatedly and consistently teaches the equality and joint calling of women and men of all ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is consistent with God’s character, the loving and equal relationships in the Trinity, and our creation, male and female, in God’s image. How do we

reconcile this overarching image of biblical equality with specific passages that seem to give conflicting instruction on the matter of submission?

Simply put, by correcting our understanding of what submission is in the first place. Contrary to the accusations, proponents of biblical equality do not reject submission at all. We actually believe in *more* submission than hierarchicalists because we believe in mutual submission for *everyone*, rather than unilateral submission limited to one group.

This may sound scary to those who are recovering from communities that use submission as a tool of spiritual abuse, who feel an automatic sense of dread and fear when the subject of submission arises. But as the articles in this issue discuss, submission, rightly understood, does not operate on the basis of domination, oppression, voicelessness, or control. Each article thoughtfully seeks to understand what submission is—and isn’t—according to the Bible. From social media misinformation and poor illustrations about stacked umbrellas to misreadings of Peter and Ephesians, misunderstandings about submission are everywhere. By understanding who Jesus is and who we are because of him, may we shed the world’s view of submission and hierarchy, and step into mutuality and unity.

Notes

1. For further reading, see *Mutuality Magazine* (Making Peace with Paul), Vol. 28, No.1, March 2021, https://www.cbeinternational.org/issue_display/display-issue/?issue_id=35457.
2. As one example, see Cindy Westfall, “Difficult Passages in the New Testament and How to Understand Them,” *Mutuality Magazine* (Women and the World), Vol. 30, No.3, September 2023, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/difficult-passages-in-the-new-testament-and-how-to-understand-them/>.
3. “CBE’s Mission and Values,” *CBE International*, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-mission/.

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