

The Divorce Rate and Exercising Authority in Marriage

In 2010 the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution entitled *On the Scandal of Southern Baptist Divorce*. The resolution states "*that conservative Protestants in the United States of America are divorcing at the same rate, if not at higher rates, than the general population.*" The divorce rate is accelerating among Southern Baptist churches. I believe I know the reason. The leaders of our Southern Baptist Convention have been strongly promoting a doctrinal error called the *Eternal Subordination of the Son*. The devastating effects of this doctrine on marriages are far-reaching.

Few Southern Baptists even know what this doctrine is, but when you go to a church led by a Southern Baptist pastor who promotes it, the emphasis of the teaching will be on "the authority of the husband" and "the subordination of the woman to her husband" (just like Jesus is allegedly eternally subordinate to the Father). When the emphasis in any Christian environment (home, church, marriage, etc...) is on authority, a breach in relationship is ripe. Here's why.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator, the radial effects of their sin included an innate desire to dominate and control one another by exerting their control over the other person. The curse causes captives of sin to concentrate on establishing an air of authority and control over others.

Some Christians seem to think that what the Bible calls "the curse" is supposed to be the norm. They think this because they wrongly say, "Jesus is eternally subordinate to the Father, therefore women should be subordinate to the male." Not so. When the first man (Adam) sought to rule over the first woman (Eve), Adam was manifesting the curse, not obeying a command (Genesis 3:16).

Jesus came to reverse the curse. Redemption causes curse-filled people to become grace-filled people. Those who seek to rule over others by exerting authority, when they come to see what Jesus says about life, will turn loose of trying to control other people and will only seek to love and serve, NEVER exerting any alleged authority. Jesus said that "the Gentiles lord over others" and "exert authority," but "it shall not be this way among you" (Matthew 20:24-26).

Southern Baptist Convention leaders are wrongly pushing for men to lord their authority over their wives and calling on wives to submit to the authority of their husbands because of a belief in and promotion of "the eternal subordination of the Son."

Someone recently called me "the Barney Fife of pastors." I think he meant it as an insult, but I laughed and received it as a compliment. Everybody can relate to Barney. Mr. Fife knew how to say it simple and make himself understood. Let me put my Barney Fife hat on for a moment and simplify and summarize for Southern Baptist men and women what Dr. Johnson is saying in his article:

1. Nobody in marriage has any inherent "authority."

Christ has all authority, and He sends His Spirit to live within us, dispenses spiritual gifts for us, and provides loving watch care over us so that we might learn how to love and serve each other.

2. Submission in a marital relationship is "putting other's needs before my own."

The submission and subordination of Jesus Christ to the Father was never about 'greater authority' because Christ had "all authority." Christ put the Father's plans first, submitting Himself to the cross in obedience to the plan of redemption (i.e., "If it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, Thy will be done"). Jesus Christ also submitted to us (the church) when He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane and died in our place. Submission is never about 'greater authority,' but rather, it is always about putting the plans, desires, and needs of others first. In marriage, both the husband and the wife are to be mutually submissive to one another (see Ephesians 5:21).

Sometimes what is in the best interest of your partner is to say no! In every decision, your partner's best interest comes first. Don't give up on your marriage until you have sweat blood looking out for your partner.

3. When we stop trying to control our spouse, and we learn what it means to love and accept him or her the same way Jesus Christ accepts us.

Only then we begin to build a marriage on grace and love instead of domination and control. When that happens, the curse is reversed. We Southern Baptists do a great many things very well. We do missions well. We perform acts of mercy well. But we are sorry at building marriages. I suggest, for the sake of Christian marriages in our churches, it is time for Southern Baptist people to call out and correct those who advocate the doctrinal error of eternal subordination.

Female Subordination to Male Authority Leads to Dysfunctional Homes and Churches

I only recently heard that Mark Driscoll has identified "the subordination of women to men" as one of the four key building blocks of his Resurgence Movement. I have addressed the doctrinal fallacies of the Gender Gospel elsewhere, fallacies that plague both liberal feminism and Fundamentalism.

I'd like to give some examples of how Bible-believing Christian families, churches, and groups move into dysfunctional, even cultish behavior, if female subordination is allowed to be taught and practiced as biblical orthodoxy.

Example #1: Most people are familiar with the removal of Sheri Klouda as Hebrew professor from Southwestern Theological Seminary by men who hold to female subordination and cringe at the thought of a woman teaching men Hebrew.

What many men and women in conservative, evangelical churches don't realize is that there are Sheri Kloudas everywhere--gifted women who are removed from responsible Christian leadership positions and/or forbidden from speaking publicly, teaching others the Word of God, or otherwise providing spiritual guidance to men because they are women.

This absurd position is totally contrary to the Gospel, anti-Christian in nature, and opposite of the teachings of Christ and His apostles.

If not stopped, it will plague Christian people with a disease of the soul that is worse than leprosy of the skin. It leads to power-hungry men seeking positions of authority and control, and an almost cultish like god complex. "I am in the image of God. My word is Law. You submit to what I say, and don't dare try to tell me what I should do." This anti-Christ doctrine fleshes itself out in conservative Christian homes and churches in various ways.

Example #2: A well-known Southern Baptist pastor recently told his congregation that he decided to move his family to a new house this year. The price of the pastor's old home (\$375,000) and the price of the pastor's new home (\$500,000) were appropriately not revealed to the congregation. However, they are relevant to this story because the pastor previously told his congregation that they were not to buy more expensive homes, but rather God desired them to set aside that extra money and give it to kingdom causes (i.e., the church).

Please don't misunderstand me. I advocate freedom for all pastors and all congregations to do as the Spirit leads; even the purchase of million-dollar-homes if that is what the Spirit leads them to do. What I find incongruous is the promotion of a so-called "radical Christianity" by those who are averse to living radically themselves. People should realize one of the prominent New Testament principles is freedom and Spirit-led living.

The problem is when pastors place themselves as an authority over the lives of others to tell them how they are to live, while at the same time doing the opposite of that they advocate. It's much better to be silent on issues the Bible is silent about.

Anyway, back to the main point. What most people in this pastor's church are not aware of is that the pastor's new home is within ten miles of his old home. Before the move, the pastor's wife insisted that the family should not move. She had several very good and valid reasons. However, the pastor informed his wife, that as the man in the home--"the one with authority"--he would make the decision to move and overrule any objections he heard. He said moving was "the right thing" to do, and submission to his authority was "the right thing" for her to do. So, the pastor's family moved. I have withheld names, but I do hope the pastor realizes the dysfunctional nature of the argument he had with his wife.

Multiply this by hundreds of times in conservative, evangelical homes and you get a picture of the problems created when Christian men have a warped view of their authority.

Example #3: A friend named Lamar Wadsworth recently wrote to me and told me about his mother's funeral. He wrote:

"When my mother died, we were not allowed to have her funeral at the Southern Baptist church where she was an active member for over FIFTY years because I had asked two women to read Scripture at the service. So, the funeral had to be held at my home church, the Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, GA. My church honored my Mother like she was one of their own and gave her the homegoing celebration she deserved. The following November, on All Saints Day--without explanation or comment, my Mother's name was included on the list of members of Heritage Baptist Church who had died in the past year. Bill Leonard said we pulled off the first posthumous transfer of church membership in Baptist history."

Can you believe it?

A Southern Baptist Church refuses to allow the funeral of one of the members of their church, a member who faithfully attended and gave to the church for over fifty years, because the son of the woman who died wanted two women to read Scripture at his mother's funeral. Again, the church is not being named in this post, but for our purposes we will call it Ichabod Baptist Church for the glory of God is truly gone from it.

Example #4: There is now a commentary on the Bible "just for women." Dorothy Patterson and Rhonda Harrington Kelley, professors of "Women's Studies" and "Women's Ministry" at Southwestern Theological Seminary and New Orleans Theological Seminary respectively, are the two women who wrote the Bible commentary "for women." On the back cover, the purpose of the commentary is revealed: "The Women's Evangelical Commentary is designed to equip women to face cultural issues regarding femininity and gender."

This is Christianese lingo for "it will help convince all you women that you should teach only women, work only in the home, and find your identity in the man God has given you."

I had dinner with Paige and Dorothy Patterson in their home in Fort Worth in 2009. I have never written the details about our conversation, nor will I, but what that dinner did for me was reinforce my decision to focus on calling out the bizarre and unbiblical views of women that are being taught by our seminary Presidents, their wives, and other 'leaders' in the SBC.

If the Spirit of God leads you, women, to never work outside the home and to focus on having as many children as possible while creating a safe environment in your home for your husband and kids, then go for it!

If you are led to the seminary to learn the skills of sewing clothes and folding napkins for a proper Southern home, then more power to you! If you live your life submitting to what you perceive as "the authority" of men, particularly the husband God has given you, then fine! Just don't dare call it biblical. Call it your cultural preference. Why? Because one day when you die you will not have a man you will call your husband. One day when you die you will exercise your gifts in God-given creative work. One day when you die your entire identity will be in Christ and no other man. One day when you die you will be given a new name, a new place to live and a new purpose for eternity-- all based upon who you are as a person-- equal to any man God created.

While you are on earth, I hope you find that the teachings of grace and equality in the Bible prepare you for eternity. But if your cultural preference is to find your identity in a man, then just be honest that you feel safer and more secure in the shadow of man's identity, and if equate your submission to God to that of a visible, physical man, then just be honest about what you are doing.

But don't call your belief in a woman's subordination to man biblical Christianity.

In fact, it's so unbiblical to the Christianity portrayed in the New Testament that it may be people who are as comfortable as you in your cultural preferences will write a Bible just for you.

May I suggest that the Bible you have from God is sufficient?