

**04/28/24 “The Spirit-Filled Marriage – Part 1
A Wife’s Submission”
Ephesians 5:22-24**

Welcome...

Read Ephesians 5:22-24...

You cannot understand the story of the Bible without understanding what the Bible says about marriage. The Bible starts with a marriage, and it ends with a marriage. It starts with the creation of man and woman and the creation of marriage, and it ends with the marriage supper of the Lamb.

God created marriage and our text today tells us that when we embrace biblical headship and submission, we help to illustrate the gospel. Christ does not submit to the church, but loves her as he lays his life down for her. And the church submits to Christ. Paul therefore commands husbands and wives to reflect this same ordering, and just as the roles of Christ and church cannot be reversed, the roles of husband and wife cannot be reversed. They exist due to divine design. Erasing the differences between men and women in marriage blurs the gospel picture.

Our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus calls Christians to be salt and light in the world so that when they see our lives they may know there is a God and come to glorify Him. Biblical masculinity, femininity and marriage glorify God and display the gospel.

The Christian faith and life are not private because the gospel is not a private affair. We cannot float downstream with the culture on same-sex marriage or the idea of living together without marriage, and we cannot be confused about the roles God has given to the husband and wife. Paul bases his teaching on marriage on the relationship between Christ and the church. In fact, the relationship between Christ and the church provides the bedrock for what Paul says to husbands and wives – and that relationship is bigger, better, and more permanent than any cultural expression of marriage.

Because Ephesians 5 talks about Christ’s relationship to the church, this passage is for all of us – whether you are single, widowed, married, or divorced. If we are Christians, then we are members of Christ’s church and this text therefore has something to say to us because it tells us about Christ’s love for us and how we should love Him. Ephesians 5 is holding up a model and telling us to “be like this.” And the model is Christ and the church, where Christ is the head of the church, and as the church submits to her head, so a wife submits to her husband.

Main point: Ephesians 5:22-24 answers three questions about a wife’s submission to her husband.

- I. How should submission work in marriage?**
- II. Why should a wife submit to her husband?**
- III. When should a wife submit to her husband?**

My prayer is that we each see and embrace the design of God for marriage where a husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. A husband provides, protects, and leads his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ – for the glory of God and as a powerful witness to others.

- I. How should submission work in marriage?**

Verse 22...

Notice the last four words, “as to the Lord.” Immediately the text takes from the horizontal to the vertical, from simply thinking that a wife’s submission is just about a human relationship to actually being about a wife’s relationship with God.

I think at this point it is helpful if we return to the creation account in Genesis to understand God’s design for marriage. Please turn with me to Genesis chapter 1.

Very early in the Bible we read that both men and women are “in the image of God.” In fact, the very first verse that tells us that God created human beings also tells us that both “male and female” are in the image of God. Look with me at Genesis 1:27, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” No other creatures in all of creation, not even the powerful angels, are said to be in the image of God. It is a privilege given only to us as men and women. To be in the image of God is an incredible privilege. It means to represent God and to be conformed to be like His Son, Jesus Christ.

Men and women have equal worth before God for all eternity, this is how we were created. This truth should exclude all our feelings of pride or inferiority and should exclude any idea that one sex is “better” or “worse” than the other.

In a Christian marriage, the love between husband and wife will show itself in honoring one another in public and in private, listening to each other’s viewpoints, valuing each other’s gifts, wisdom, and desires, and always seeking to bring benefit, not harm, to one another.

After God created Adam and gave him directions concerning his life in the Garden of Eden, we read in Genesis 2:18...

Genesis 2 does not merely say that Eve functions as Adam’s “helper” in one or two specific events. Rather, it says that God made Eve for the purpose of providing Adam with help, one who by virtue of creation would function as Adam’s “helper.”

The apostle Paul understands this accurately because in 1 Corinthians 11:9 he writes, “for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.” Eve’s role, and the purpose that God had in mind when He created her, was that she would be “a helper” for Adam.

The Hebrew word *kenegdô* means “a help corresponding to him,” someone who is like man but opposite him. Like opposite? Well wait a minute make up your mind. You cannot have both!

But you can, if the two complement one another. Your Bible probably has a footnote where it says, “a helper corresponding to.”

You see two pieces of a puzzle do not fit together if they are identical. On the other hand, they just can’t be any shape. They have to be rightly different, they have to be like opposite. They have to be perfectly complementary.

So verse 18 tells us that God is sending into Adam’s life, and God is sending into Eve’s life, somebody who is very powerful and different – like, opposite. An incredibly different person thrown together into an incredibly close relationship. How close?

One flesh. Verse 24...

But the honeymoon bliss in paradise did not last too long. In Genesis chapter 3 we learn that Adam and Eve sinned. Look at Genesis 3:7-9....

In the Hebrew text, the expression “the man” and the pronouns “him” and “you” are all singular. Even though Eve had sinned first, God first summoned Adam to give an account for what had happened. This suggests that Adam was the one primarily accountable for what had happened in his family.

An analogy to this is seen in the life of a human family. When a parent comes into a room where several children have been misbehaving and have left the room in chaos, the parent will probably summon the oldest and say, “What happened here?” This is because, though all are responsible for their behavior, the oldest child bears the primary responsibility.

In a similar way, when God summoned Adam to give an account, it indicated a primary responsibility for Adam in the conduct of his family. This is similar to the situation in Genesis 2:15–17, where God had given commands to Adam alone before the Fall, indicating there was also a primary responsibility that belonged to Adam.

By contrast, in Genesis 3:1 Satan in the form of a serpent spoke to Eve first, trying to get her to take responsibility for leading the family into sin, and inverting the order that God had established at creation. God pronounces the curse of sin in Genesis 3:14-19...

God’s words to Satan in verse 15 are called the protevangelium, “the first Gospel,” because this is the first announcement of the coming Redeemer found in the Bible. To God’s Old Covenant people, this verse was a beacon of hope (Galatians 4:1–4); to Satan, it was God’s declaration of war, climaxing in his condemnation (Romans 16:20); and to Eve, it was the assurance that she was forgiven and that God would use a woman to bring the Redeemer into the world (1 Timothy 2:13–15).

One aspect of the curse was upon the woman, adding pain to child-bearing. A second aspect of the curse was imposing pain on Adam’s particular area of responsibility, raising food from the ground.

A third aspect of the curse was to introduce pain and conflict into the relationship between Adam and Eve. Prior to their sin, they had lived in the Garden of Eden in perfect harmony, yet with a leadership role belonging to Adam as the head of his family.

But after the Fall, God introduced conflict in that Eve would have an inward urging and impulsion to oppose Adam, to resist Adam’s leadership. The Hebrew says in 3:16 “Your desire, your impulse, will be against your husband.”

And Adam would respond with a rule over Eve that came from his greater strength and aggressiveness, a rule that was forceful and at times harsh. “And he because of his greater strength will rule over you.” There would be pain in tilling the ground, pain in bearing children, and pain and conflict in their relationship.

Knowing this, we would expect to find that when the promised Redeemer comes, the curse will be reversed. We would expect that salvation in the Savior would be a reversal of this curse. We would expect to find an undoing of the wife’s antagonistic or aggressive impulses against her husband and the husband’s harsh rule over his wife.

In fact, that is exactly what we find. We read in Colossians 3:18, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.”

This command is an undoing by the Holy Spirit of the inner compulsion of the wife to oppose her husband and the husband to be unkind to his wife. Through salvation and redemption in Christ, God reestablishes the beauty of the relationship between husband and wife that existed from the moment they were created. Before their fall

into sin, Eve was subject to Adam as the head of the family. Adam loved his wife and was not harsh with her in his leadership. That is the pattern that the New Testament commands husbands and wives to follow.

When the apostle Paul discusses marriage and wishes to speak of the relationship between husband and wife, he does not look back to any sections of the Old Testament telling about the situation after sin came into the world. Rather, he looks all the way back to Genesis 2, prior to the Fall, and uses that creation order to speak of marriage. Look at Ephesians 5:31-32... In verse 31 he quotes Genesis 2:24.

In Ephesians 5 Paul makes clear that the relationship between Christ and the church is not reversible. There is a leadership or headship role that belongs to Christ that the church does not have. Similarly, in marriage as God created it to be, there is a leadership role for the husband that the wife does not have. And it is important to notice that this relationship was there from the beginning of creation, in the beautiful marriage between Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Verse 22...

Paul says wives are to “be subject to their own husbands, as to the Lord” (5:22). Notice in the New American Standard translation, the words “be subject” are in italics. This indicates that the original Greek text does not include these words. But the Greek grammar makes it clear that Paul is simply continuing the thought introduced in 5:18 through 5:21.

The spirit-filled life is explained with participles — speaking, singing, thanking, and “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

The Greek text then says, literally in verse 22, “The wives to their own husbands.” Note that Paul is speaking here only about the marriage relationship (wives and husbands), not about the general relationship between men and women. He makes this clear with the Greek word *idios* - “your own.” Wives are not told to be in submission to every man but to their own husbands.

It would be helpful to define submission.

Definition: Biblical submission is the attitude and action of willingly and wholeheartedly respecting, yielding to, and obeying the authority of another.

That definition applies to all of the spheres of authority: to God Himself; human government; church government; wives to husbands; children to parents; and workers to employers. It includes our attitude, because it is not to be forced, but willing and wholehearted as to the Lord.

The submission of a wife to her husband flows from being filled continually with the Holy Spirit. It is part of the Spirit-filled life that Paul is teaching. Only by the power of the indwelling Spirit can this be done!!

This submission does not in any way demean the one who is submitting. We know this first and foremost because the Lord is commanding this of us, and His commands are not burdensome!!

In Matthew 11:30 Jesus said, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1 John 5:3 says, “This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome.”

II. Why should a wife submit to her husband?

Verse 23...

The wife's supreme motive for submitting to her husband is the fact that he is her functional head in the family, just as Christ also is the head of the church.

Look at Ephesians 1:20-23 with me...

The headship of the husband is similar to Christ's headship over the church... it is a position of authority; the right to lead, the right to command and make decisions.

Notice this headship is beneficial to the body. 5:23...

So this authority is not damaging to the body, but actually is used to save the church.

The worldly vision of authority must be rejected. Matthew 20:25-28 says, "Jesus called His disciples together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 we read, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."

First, Christ is the head of every man. Jesus is in a position of authority. In Matthew 28:18 He declared, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Those who willingly submit to His authority constitute the church, and those who rebel against His authority constitute the world.

Second, the man is the head of a woman. This is what we read in Ephesians 5:23...

This is a simple indicative statement that the husband is head of the wife. There's not an imperative or subjunctive here. What do I mean by that? The husband is declared to be the head, the husband is the head of the wife, he's not encouraged to be the head, he's not commanded to be the head. Nothing is said about what kind of head you should be here; that'll come later in the chapter. You should be Christ-like, but it's not the husband *ought* to be the head of the wife or is *expected* to be, he just *is* the head.

We need to understand how unconfused God is about all of this. God is not confused at all about what he intends in marriage. He's not confused by Supreme Court decisions that try to redefine marriage or by high-level academic books. He just knows exactly what His design is for marriage.

The moment the bride says "I do" at that wedding, the groom, her husband becomes, in God's eyes, her head. God is expecting the husband to lead and is expecting the wife to honor and submit to her husband as to the Lord.

III. When should a wife submit to her husband?

Verse 24...

"In everything" means the wife doesn't mark out "off limits" zones with her husband, just as the church does not do that with Christ. What submission requires is an attitude of trust, respect, and honor that graciously recognizes your husband's God-given authority, and willingly accepts your husband's leadership and responsibility.

Now at this point, you might be crying out in your head, “But you don’t know my husband!” You’re probably right, I don’t know your husband like you do. And to the husbands listening, you know even better than your wife just how far short of Christlike leadership you fall.

But notice verse 24 does not say, “wives submit to your own husbands when they love you or when you think they deserve it.” It does not say, “Wives submit when your husband faithfully does his part and then you can do yours.” The only fine print in the marriage covenant and in this command to submit is “as to the Lord” in verse 22 and “in everything” in verse 24.

Having said that, however, there is a qualification. You must never follow God-ordained authority into God-forbidden activity. Let me say that again, you must never follow God-ordained authority, into God-forbidden activity.

A wife is to submit as to the Lord but if a husband’s demands are in conflict with obedience to Christ, Jesus wins every time. If a husband forbids a wife to attend church, or to read the Bible to their children, or join him in sexual immorality, or to lie or steal, or to neglect or abuse their children, then the wife’s first duty is to obey Christ and submit to her eternal groom, not her earthly one.

In Acts chapter 5, Peter and the apostles were commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching the Gospel of Christ. In Acts 4:29 we read, But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

Or consider the situation with Ananias and Sapphira at the beginning of Acts chapter 5. It turns out they both mutually agreed to lie to the Holy Spirit about the amount of money they got from the sale. But suppose only Ananias had wanted to; Sapphira would not have been compelled to follow her husband into lying before the church about the amount of money they got from that real estate deal. Her sin was her own and she was judged for it.

The wife should submit to her husband as to the Lord, but you need to remember that your husband is NOT the Lord. He is a sinner and there may be times that his leadership will not be godly, and you must not follow him into sin.

Which also means do not submit to an abusive husband. Nowhere in Scripture does it condone a wife being abused physically, sexually, financially, socially, or even spiritually by her husband.

Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 10:23, “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.”

If you are being persecuted or abused by your husband, then do not let it continue unaddressed. I know it will take courage, but you need to come speak to the elders of the church. To leave an abusive situation unchecked and unaddressed is not submission.

Friends, in a world that is pathetically gender-confused, and people seem to have no idea what femininity and masculinity even mean anymore, God has given us believers Ephesians chapter 5 so that we are not confused. The wife is given a role the husband does not have—church-like submission. And the husband is given a role the wife does not have—Christlike headship. From these cues, we get a strong sense of masculinity – men being servant leadership in the pattern of Christ; femininity being trusting, loving, joyful submission in the pattern of the church.

In closing, if you are a single person here and think this does not apply to you, I want you how glad I am that you’re here, how glad I am that you’ve heard even if you wonder “What is this, how is this relevant to my life?”

God sent His Son into the world to die for sinners like you and me, and God brought you here, not so much to hear about the submission of a wife to her husband, but your submission to Christ the King.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30.... Will you submit to Christ? Let's pray...