

MBC - 1/14/2017 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“*Wives Submit to Your Own Husbands*”
Ephesians 5:22-33

In chs.4-6, Paul is describing the walk of the new man or woman in Christ. It’s a walk that is worthy of Christ and the Gospel, a walk that is radically different than the surrounding world. It’s a walk in sacrificial love. It’s a walk in wisdom, and it’s a walk in the Holy Spirit. Paul goes on describing what this Spirit-filled walk looks like in our marriages—

- Ephesians 5:21-33 ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

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Intro: The glorious purpose of marriage.

Ray Ortlund Jr. is a top-drawer Bible scholar. He says this about marriage—

- “The universe we live in was created primarily with marital romance in mind. The heavens and the earth were created for the marriage of Adam and Eve. The new heavens and the new earth will be created for the marriage of Christ and his bride. The whole of cosmic reality exists as the venue for the eternal honeymoon of the perfect husband with his perfect bride in marital bliss forever and ever. It is not as though marriage is just one theme among others in the Bible. Instead, marriage is the wrap-around concept for the entire Bible, within which the other themes find their places.”

Doesn’t that elevate and exalt the way we should think about marriage? God actually created and designed marriage to enable us comprehend the incomprehensible love of Jesus Christ for His Church. If you go into a Christian bookstore and ask the sales person where to find the books on marriage, they will probably tell you: “Look in the Christian living section.” But from what Paul teaches here, books on marriage should be found under “Atonement:” Christian marriage is meant to picture the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, willingly dying on the cross to redeem the Church as His precious Bride; and the joyful, loving submission of the Church to her Lord and Savior.

- I.e., If you want to think rightly about marriage, you don’t do it by looking at some celebrity couple, or even by looking at a godly Christian couple. You look at the *cross*: You men, see Jesus, bleeding, suffering there - “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” That’s the way you are to love your wife. That’s what headship means in this passage. It has nothing to do with bossing your wives around, or making all the

decisions. The only command for you is “*love your wife,*” and do it “*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” You lay down your *life* for her.

- And you wives, to understand your role in your marriage, stare at the cross: imagine yourself as one of those faithful few women who were gathered at the foot of the cross as Jesus was dying. See Him there - dying for your sins to redeem you - oh, how you would love Him! How you would want to please Jesus and obey Him. You would never consider that chore, or drudgery. “*So also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*”

It’s stunning to realize that earthly marriage was created by God to give a glimpse at “*the eternal honeymoon of the perfect husband with his perfect bride in marital bliss forever and ever.*”

This is the ideal. *Every* earthly marriage falls short of the ideal because we’re sinners, but we must keep holding up God’s ideal and purpose for marriage and not avoid the topic because it’s painful. Or worse, go along with the world’s foolish ideas about marriage.

*And let me say this to those of you who are single, divorced, or widowed. We’re not leaving you out here. You need to hear these truths about marriage because they illustrate Gospel truths! If we let the Scriptures speak, the more you understand marriage, the better you will understand the Gospel!

- And for those of you who are single and might one day marry - oh my goodness! - you *really* need to hear what God’s Word says about marriage! You need to know the kind of person *you* should be going into marriage, and you need to know what kind of person to marry - preferably *before* you marry them. I know a gal who waited for years to get married, but ended up with a loser for a husband: She said, “There’s only one thing worse than waiting - *wishing you still were.*”

This morning we’re going to begin with what God says to wives, but lest we lose the forest in the trees, jump down to v.33. This sums up the roles of husband and wife in marriage—

- Ephesians 5:33 ³³However, let each one of you *love* his wife *as himself*, and let the wife see that she *respects* her husband.

But aren’t these just two sides of the same coin? If you flip your outline over, read with me the first paragraph from John Stott’s commentary on Ephesians—

- We have seen that the essence of Paul’s instruction is ‘Wives submit, husbands love’, and that these words are different from one another since they recognize the headship which God has given to the husband. Yet when we try to define the two verbs, it is not easy to distinguish clearly between them. What does it mean to ‘submit’? It is to give oneself up to somebody. What does it mean to ‘love’? It is to give oneself up for somebody, as Christ ‘gave himself up’ for the church. Thus ‘submission’ and ‘love’ are two aspects of the very same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.

And - it’s the foundational truth of the Gospel!

Well that was a long introduction, but now let’s review what we learned last week—

Review-

We just focused on v.21—

- Ephesians 5:21 ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ - “in the fear of Christ.”

The first thing we saw is that this is a result of the filling of the Spirit, and the Spirit will always, lead us to submitting to the lordship of Christ - doing everything “*in the fear of Christ.*”

But we also saw that this passage is often misinterpreted: it is not teaching *mutual submission or reciprocal submission*. Now the Bible teaches this, Paul taught this: that we all humble ourselves and serve each other, and we put others and their needs ahead of our own. All of us are to “*give preference to one another in honor.*” Paul said that in Romans 12:10.

But that’s not what he is teaching here. Here he means the responsibility each of us has to submit to whatever God-given authorities we are under. And we know this is what he means because he breaks it down in the following verses. wives submit to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters. The word itself, “*submitting*” is *always* used of one-way submission to authority. It’s never used of reciprocal, mutual submission.

- And we spent a whole message on this because when it comes to marriage, the growing opinion in the church today, in this country, is that our mutual submission to one another (based on the wrong interpretation of this verse) *cancel out* a wife’s submission to her husband. The fleshly logic is that if both are equal, then one can’t have authority over the other. The term for this is *egalitarianism*.

But it’s bogus. Even within the Trinity, there is equality of Persons, and differentiation of roles - in perfect harmony, with no contradiction. In the same way, husbands and wives are 100% equal as persons. They each bear the image of God - how could they not be equal? But within this equality of persons, wives are to submit to the loving headship of their husbands. Equal, but different. The term for this is *complementarianism*.

And all functional submission is an expression of our submission to Christ. That’s the way v.21 ends: “*in the fear of Christ,*” and notice that it’s also the way v.22 ends—

- *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord!*

Ladies, that doesn’t mean, close your eyes, hold your nose, and pretend that your husband is Jesus! Uh, spoiler alert: he’s not. Paul isn’t saying, “When you look at your husband, you should see Jesus.” No, he’s saying, “Look *past* your husband and submit to Jesus - *by* submitting to your husband.” Oh, ladies, write this in your Bibles: biblical submission means submitting to your husband as an expression of your loving submission to the Lord. It’s just one of the many ways you love and obey Christ.

- That puts submission in the category of worship offered up to God. When you are fulfilling your God-designed role in the home - which might seem mundane: washing the clothes, changing the diapers, paying the bills, ordering stuff on Amazon Prime (we know what you do all day long), God accepts that as the fragrant aroma of worship. And even if the husband and kids don’t appreciate it, your heavenly Father does! You learn to see submission like that and it will shake up your marriage.

And we can turn it around: Husbands, your duty is to love your bride in the same sacrificial way that Jesus loves His Bride, and you do that as an expression of *your* submission to the lordship of Jesus.

*Now let me stop here and make an observation: have you noticed that the Christian life is all about Jesus? Believing Him, loving Him, understanding what He did, leaning on Him, and emulating Him. In this section on Christian marriage and family, 10 out of the 13 verses we just read mention *Jesus*, directly or by pronoun.

- *And I don't know why it is that we tend to read this passage as though the role God calls wives to is a burdensome chore, but the husbands' role is gravy: Really? Which is the harder calling, to be in the place of the church submitting to Jesus, or to be in the place of Jesus loving and sacrificing His life for His church? Ladies, I don't think you really want to trade places!

But whatever your God-assigned role, it is meant for your good and for your growth in Christ. It is meant to be blessing and freedom for you - not a ball and chain. And please listen, your God-assigned role is also meant for the good and growth and blessing and freedom of your husband or wife!

Remember: the context for all of this is living full of the Holy Spirit, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's as happy as you can get, this side of heaven! Now let's see what the wife's role is all about. Paul makes three statements here for wives—

I. The meaning of submission.

- Ephesians 5:22 ²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Notice, “to your own husbands.”)
- Ephesians 5:24 ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (This doesn't mean, “You must do everything your husband says - there are limits to submission. It means that you don't cordon off certain areas of your life from your husband's headship.) And then v.33, puts a lasso around all that Paul says about roles in marriage.
- Ephesians 5:33 ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Love and respect! Those two words should characterize your marriage, and the way you both treat each other. But specifically, the husband is commanded to love his wife, and the wife is commanded to submit to and respect her husband. Now for commentary, we're going to turn over to 1 Peter and see what Peter had to say, and remember, he was a married man.

- 1 Peter 3:1-5 ¹Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.

A. The biblical context.

v.1: "*Likewise*, wives, be subject to your own husbands," "Likewise" means that Peter is pointing us backwards, and we need to see the context here—turn back to:

- 1Pe 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, *so that* when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

"The day of visitation," is whenever the Spirit of God awakens and calls a person to Christ. When that happens, some of the same people who used to mock you and call you a weirdo, will praise God for your conduct that helped win them over to Christ.

And what kind of godly conduct will win people to Jesus Christ? What Peter tells us is surprising, it's not what you and I would think. Look at the very next words--

- 1Pe 2:13 Be subject (same word as "submit," *hupotasso*) for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme. . . he goes on.

Submission to God-given authority will win people to Christ? That's what he says! And notice, just like Paul, he says that this submission is "*for the Lord's sake*," then he goes on to break it down:

- 1Pe 2:18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.
- 1Pe 3:1 Likewise [i.e., in the same that we are be subject to every human institution], wives, be subject to your own husbands. Even those who are disobedient to the Word.
- 1 Pe 5:5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. (in the church)

And this all goes back to 2:12: When the world sees God's people submitting to God-instituted authority - "*for the Lord's sake*," it can win them to Christ. Submission is evangelism!

- You say, "How in the world is my submission to authority a witness for the Gospel?" Well, our world is in defiant rebellion against God, right? Ungrateful, and unsubmitive. But Christians have been conquered by Jesus Christ. We've laid down our arms. We aren't perfect, but we're not rebelling against God anymore. And when the world sees that we have submitted ourselves to the authorities God has placed over us, they are seeing something supernatural! And if they ask you to give an account for the hope that is in you, you can tell them about the Lord Jesus - your ultimate authority.

You say, "I still don't get that." Well, I think the world does. A wife who isn't trashing-talking her husband at the beauty salon stands out. Kids who are obedient to their parents make an impression. Our daughter Sara said that she had all 5 boys at the dentist the other day. When they were getting ready to leave the receptionist said, "Your boys are so good! I wish I could take all of you home with me!" So she left the boys with her. . . Later they were all going through the checkout line at the store and the checker said "Well you are just perfect little boys," and 8-year old William said, "*No one is perfect except Jesus!*"

People might be baffled by what you believe, but they can't argue with results. Submission to authority is a witness to unbelievers. That's exactly what Peter says to wives who are married to unbelievers—

- 1 Peter 3:1 ¹Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,

A Christian wife's submission to her unbelieving husband's God-given authority, can win him to Christ. That is a mind-blower. And I know this might seem hard to impossible, but I want you to understand how hard it would have been to some of the wives to whom Peter was writing, especially if their husbands were *not* Christians. Let me tell you what they were up against—

B. The cultural context

Under Roman law, a woman had no legal rights. In the eyes of the law, she remained forever a child. As long as she was under her father's roof, she remained under the *patria potestas*, "the father's power," which even included the right of life and death over her. When she married, that power passed into the hands of her husband. In the first century--when Peter is writing--a Roman ruler named Cato wrote: "If you catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial." Roman wives were prohibited from drinking alcohol, and a man named Egnatius beat his wife to death when he found her drinking wine. Sulpicius Gallus divorced his wife because she went out into the streets without her veil. Publius Sophus divorced his wife for going to the amphitheater to attend the games.

- And for a Christian wife to have a different religion than her husband was to put her marriage or even her life in jeopardy. The Greek historian Plutarch said, "A wife should not acquire her own friends, but should make her husband's friends her own. The gods are the first and most significant friends. For this reason, it is proper for a wife to recognize only those gods whom her husband worships."

Imagine trying to submit to your husband in that culture? But what did the Holy Spirit say to those women? "*Express your hope in God by submitting to your own husband.*" And precisely because it requires supernatural grace, it can be the witness to your husband that brings him to Christ.

C. The definition.

Remember that "Be subject" is the word *hupotasso*, a military term that meant to arrange yourself under, fall into line. Submission is a recognition of and a yielding to, God-given authority. *For a Christian wife, submission means yielding to your husband's judgments and wishes with a supportive, cooperative heart. It means affirming and honoring him in his God-given position.* Because he is always right? Not hardly! Not even because he is smarter, or more competent in leading the home. Competence, giftedness, intelligence, all have ZERO to do with your husband's headship. You might very well be smarter than your husband, better at everything than your husband. But you submit to him because God has ordained him to be the head of the home--*even if he is a less than perfect Christian. Even if he is an unbeliever, Peter says.*

Janice's spiritual mentor over the years has been Elisabeth Elliot. Listen to what this godly lady says about submission:

"Christians—both men and women—recognize first the authority of Christ. They pray 'Thy will be done.' They set about making an honest effort to cooperate with what He is doing, straightening out the kinks in their own lives according to his wishes. A Christian woman, then, in submission to God, recognizes the divinely assigned authority of her husband (he didn't earn it, remember, he received it by appointment). She then sets about lending her full strength to helping him do what he's supposed to do, be what he's

supposed to be—her head. She’s not always trying to get her own way. She’s trying to make it easier for him to do his job. She seeks to contribute to his purpose, not scheme how to accomplish her own.

"But my husband is fallible," you say. So's mine. (And she went through 3 husbands! - by death, not divorce.) But my **submission** to him is obedience to God. How far am I prepared to entrust myself into my Father's hands? That is the real question. We must learn to submit our "What if's" and "Yeah, but's" to God. To the humble and honest soul who does not proudly and arrogantly assume that God's arrangement of things will not "work" in her case, the light of grace will always be given.

And Elizabeth Elliot’s mentor, that amazing missionary to India, *Amy Carmichael*, said this—

- “Instead of the word *submission*, I should write *acceptance*, for more and more, as life goes on, that word opens doors into rooms of infinite peace, and the heart that accepts asks nothing, for it is at rest, and the pilgrim of love does not need a map or chart. “I know my road, it leadeth to His heart.”

Remember ladies, your submission to your husband is a display of the submission of the Church to Jesus Christ. That’s a positive thing. You should ask yourself, “How can I represent to my husband something of the church’s joyful submission to Christ?”

*In everyday life it looks like this: You need to make a decision on whether or not to pack up the family and move to another state. So you both talk it out, and the wife has every right, as a child of God, with a brain, to give her input. Woe to the husband who doesn’t listen to his wife! You are equal as persons - remember? Therefore, the wife’s input, ideas, and wisdom are just as valid as the husband’s and in many marriages - including mine - the wife has *more* wisdom and intelligence. And she has the right, in Christ, to give it.

- And a godly husband should always defer to his wife if her ideas and input are better. It would be stupid not to. But submission means that in the end, if the husband has made up his mind, the wife defers to her husband’s decision - wise or not, because God has appointed him as the head. And she submits to her husband as submission to the Lord. That means that he is accountable to God for his actions and decisions. But it also means that she can rest in that and leave the consequences up to God.

Janice pointed out to me that often God wants to do something great in a marriage, or family, through the mistakes of the husband. Ladies, if you dig in your heels and don’t submit, you might be forfeiting those lessons and blessings. You are in the safe zone when you obey Scripture and submit to your husband, even when he’s wrong. God will take care of you, and deal with them.

- And remember, I’m going to deal with your husbands next Sunday - so just hold out for another week.

But I know what you ladies are thinking: "How far does this submission thing go? Am I his slave? What if he wants me to do something sinful? Are there *exceptions*?"

I get that. But the starting place is the rule, not the exceptions. Repeat. The question is, “Are you trying your best to submit, or looking for loopholes? Is it your heart’s desire to submit to your husband, and would it grieve you if can’t? This was probably the question most asked of Elizabeth Elliot over her many years. Listen to how she answered it—

- “But Elisabeth, you don’t seem to realize that *my* case is an exception!” Is it? Then it’s not my business. I try to stick to what the Bible does say, not to what it doesn’t say. He didn’t give us any footnotes. Take your special case to the foot of the cross. Have a long, honest look at it there. Let the light of Christ illuminate your situation.”

Isn’t that good? Have you prayed about it? Sought God’s heart? Done everything you can to submit? Start with the rule, not he exceptions! Refusing to submit should always be the last resort, not the first reaction. But, what is—

II. The extent of submission.

There are exceptions. Submission to human authority is *never* absolute. You only have one absolute Master, and that’s Jesus. The Apostles were told by the Jewish authorities that they must stop preaching the Gospel, they said, “We must obey God rather than men - we’re preaching!” And they did, while they also did everything they could do to honor and submit to the rulers and authorities over them!

- No Christian should ever submit to the government, police officer, church elder, parent, or husband who requires you to do something God forbids, or forbids you to do something God commands. I.e., submission to Jesus’ lordship come first, and sometimes saying yes to His lordship means saying no to the authority over you.

But even if you are forced into the position of refusing your husband's requests, you can do so with a respectful attitude--a *"gentle and quiet spirit."* I.e., even if you can’t submit, do it with a submissive attitude!

- Remember Daniel's reaction in Daniel ch.1 - you should go home and read that chapter - when he was commanded to eat non-kosher food: he didn’t scream and shout about his rights—he respectfully proposed an alternative. He showed that he had a willingness to be submissive to authority. And God honored Daniel’s request. Wives, learn a lesson here. Rather than responding to a foolish or sinful request by planting your feet, crossing your arms, and delivering a sermon, be a peacemaker! Identify what it is that your husband is really after and see if you can work out a non-sinful compromise.

Example: He says, "I don't like you spending all of your time at Bible studies and church. I want you home with me."

- Now you can glare at him and declare that "you will obey God rather than man." Or, you can say, "Honey, I'm sorry if you have felt neglected. I can stop going to my evening Bible study if you really want me to. As far as church, God commands me to go to church, but let me fix you a big breakfast, and I'll get home as quickly as I can and spend the rest of the day with you."

Do you see the difference? And do you see how you have just expressed your submission to God through your submissive attitude toward your husband? That is a witness!

Let me give you just 3 general things that submission does not mean—

1.) It never means that you submit to your husband’s request if they are sinful or immoral. I.e., if he requires you to do something God forbids, or forbids you to do something God commands.

Ladies, you *never* have to tolerate physical or sexual abuse - you are a person with dignity in God’s sight. God doesn’t call His daughters to be objects of abuse. And if that happens, you

get out and get safe, and don't go back until you are safe. You say, what about verbal and emotional abuse? Well there is every shade of grey there. I say, you take as much as you can by God's grace, but when it crosses the line and is too much for you to bear, get out and get safe. There are so many variations and factors, that I'll leave it there. Go to the Lord and His Word for counsel. Go to another godly woman or your pastor or for counsel.

2.) Submission doesn't mean that you must think like your husband, or agree with your husband.

This is obvious, since Peter is talking to ladies with unsaved husbands here. You can't agree with him in his unbelief! If an unsaved husband says, "You can't be a Christian, we are an atheist family," the wife politely says, "Sorry honey, but I'm a follower of Jesus Christ."

- What if that causes the unbelieving husband to end the marriage? So be it. That's exactly what Paul deals with in Cor.7, and didn't Jesus say that the Gospel often brings the sword and divides families, and marriages.

No husband can forbid his wife to read her Bible, or attend church, or fellowship with other believers, or witness to unbelievers - God commands these things. A wife should *not* submit - but she should not submit, *submissively!* With a gracious spirit that communicates respect and a desire that her husband would lead in such a way that she can submit to him.

And we can go further: submission doesn't require that a wife agrees with her husband's political views, or taste in music, or whatever (especially if it's country). Marriage is not a call to be a robot. You are not obligated to leave your brain at the wedding altar.

2.) Submission doesn't mean that you can't seek to influence your husband.

Again, this is obvious because Peter is telling ladies how they *can* win their husbands!

I think we misunderstand Peter here if we think that "without a word" means that you can't speak to your husband about spiritual things, or you can't respectfully correct him when he is wrong. I think that what Peter means is that when your words don't work, your godly behavior is your secret weapon!

Whether your husband is a Christian who is falling short in his role, or an unbeliever, don't seek to win him over by nagging him, or writing Bible verses in permanent marker on his beer cans! Instead, let him see *"your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear--but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands."*

Hope in God submit and yourself to your husband; be pure and faithful and let your appearance say to him and to everyone else: "I belong to my husband." Be preoccupied with your inner beauty, with having a gentle and quiet spirit that comes from trusting in Christ.

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There's so much more we could say, but let me end with this true story. The great theologian, Augustine, lived in the 5th century. In his *Confessions*, he wrote this about his mother Monica,

- "She served her husband as her master, and did all she could to win him for You, speaking to him of You by her conduct, by which You made her beautiful . . . Finally, when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for You."