

Ephesians 5:22-24  
"A Word To The Wives"

Is it just me or as Americans do we seem to have a problem w/authority? It's like its woven into our DNA. In one respect our country was *founded* on rebellion... It's almost like it's "anti-American" to give in to authority. John Mellencamp wrote the song & that was the whole chorus, "I fight authority, authority always wins." "Been doin it since I was a young kid..." You know, like that's the admirable, American thing to do! Now we desire *power*, but resist authority (seems counterintuitive doesn't it?)

Yet the bible is clear that things like order, authority, structure & rank are simply part & parcel w/life (in virtually every arena). If you decide you don't want to be under rank in the military, it's called mutiny. If there's no order or authority in society, it's called anarchy. & God has established an order/structure of rank/authority w/in every arena of the Christian walk & way of life. Be it in the church, the work place or the home.

Today, we'll begin to look at the *nucleus* of the home (the marriage relationship). We'll see God's address to the wives today, the husbands next time. (Ladies, that means you better make sure your men make it back next week ☺).

But it's interesting; Vs 22-33 of Eph Ch 5 is the longest, single most detailed passage of scripture on marriage in the entire bible. (Btw we need to realize it's not God's marriage *counsel*, these are God's marriage *commands*). **However, it's not about an earthly marriage w/heavenly meaning, the passage is actually speaking of a heavenly marriage that gives the earthly its meaning. That's why Paul says in Vs 32, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ & the church."**

So as we go through this, realize that God is up to more than simply giving our lives structure & order (though that would be enough). He's painting a picture in the marriage union that speaks to the sacrificial love of Christ for His church & the church's loving, willful submission to Christ as the Head of the church (the Savior of the body). There are evangelical overtones to a godly marriage.

**That's why Satan wants to distort, pervert & destroy the marriage union. So, if you've ever wondered why your marriage seems so difficult at times, now you know. Now I wouldn't want to give the devil all the blame (or credit), we do plenty to dismantle our marriages on our own. But make no mistake, he wants you to *fail* when it comes to your marriage, God wants you to *fight* when it comes your marriage (not *in* it, but *for* it).**

Ok, everyone comes into their marriage w/an idea of roles...

They may've gathered them from their parents, maybe observing the marriages of friends, perhaps current cultural norms, something they've read or watched on T.V.

But ultimately, if we're to have a marriage union that runs the course fruitfully, successfully than we'd do well to gain our understanding from the One who created & ordained the marriage union in the 1<sup>st</sup> place, would you agree? & What we discover when we read our bibles is the fact that marriage is not a man-made institution, something that man just kind of made up & fell into along life's way. But that in the very beginning, after God had created everything & said that it was very good, He said that it *was not good* that man should be alone. He said that he would make a "helper" comparable to him. So He caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam & He took from His side & created the woman. & God brought her to the man & Adam said, "This is now bone of *my* bones & flesh of *my* flesh." & We read, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*<sup>1</sup> Marriage isn't man's idea, it's God's. Therefore, He reserves the right to order it according to His own eternal purposes & we do well to seek & *subject* ourselves to that order accordingly.

Which brings us right up to where we concluded last week. Paul was exhorting us unto the Spirit filled life. That we not hinder the work of the Spirit in/through us (through sin in our lives), but rather we give Him His way completely. & We were considering the fruit of the Spirit filled life. It's not tongues, miracles & eccentric spiritual experiences. It's a life of worship (publicly/personally) one that glorifies J.C. specifically. It's a life of gratitude for the great things God has done for us in saving us, blessing us w/every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, causing heaven to be our home & so much more... & It's a life that gives *preference* to one another (Vs 21) "submitting to one another in the fear of God."

We're to recognize that (as the body of Christ) we're a team. & We're not to put personal interest above the interest of the whole. & I'm just going to tell you that if you're not filled w/God's Spirit, you'll find it impossible to maintain a position of submission to one another. - But now that he has our attention regarding the principle of authority/submission, he moves into the nucleus of the family, the husband/wife relationship (as goes the family so goes the church...) (if the ministry is to be healthy than the marriages need to be healthy). So...

**Vs 22-24**

Ladies, there is a sum total of 1 command God gives you here. Only 1...

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ge 2:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So, it should be easy right? ☺ Your instruction is contained in 3 Vs. The husbands get more than double that. So... (I'm sure you'll want to be here for that ☺).

Now why is it that Paul addresses the wives 1<sup>st</sup>? To me it was obvious, because of the 2 they're generally the biggest problem! (Just kidding, relax a little! ☺)

Listen, the topic at hand is submission *one to another* (Vs 21). Paul was speaking generally in Vs 21, he begins to speak specifically in Vs 22. In other words; if we're to submit to one another generally, how much more does this apply w/in marriage & family? So he addresses it accordingly, beginning w/wives. & Let me say this, he's addressing believers. Let's not forget he's aiming ultimately at the mystery of Vs 32 concerning Christ & the church. He's not putting forth a model for society in general, he's speaking to the Christian home.

"Wives, submit." Now we want to talk about this for a minute. What does it mean to submit? It means "to be in subjection under". It's to recognize that someone has legitimate authority over you. It means you recognize that there is an order of authority, and that you are part of a unit, a team. & That you as an individual are not more important than the working of the unit or the team.

But again, the principle of submission (in some form or another) governs the whole of our lives. When we submit to the police, we recognize their authority & act accordingly. When we submit to our employer, we recognize their authority & act accordingly. So, submission (contrary to what many men want to believe) is not simply for wives. It's for all of us in several different arenas.

& This word "submit" or "subject to" is found at least 32 times in our N.T. It's not just here w/in the context of wives. We discover in Luke 2:51 that Jesus was submissive to His parents as a Child. We discover in Rom 13:1 that *we're all* to be subject to governing authorities. Paul writes, *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."*<sup>2</sup> Peter tells us that we're to submit ourselves to the ordinances (or laws) that man appoints (the law of the land, 1 Pet 2:13). Young people are to submit to their elders, employees to employers. & Ultimately (should go w/out say but James says it [4:7]) we're all to *submit to God*. We're to recognize *His* authority & act accordingly! So, submission is a recognition of authority, & placing myself under it accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 13:1]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Submission *is not* a recognition or admission of *inferiority*. Nor does it mean the wife is to be silent. Jesus subjected Himself to His earthly parents yet was certainly *not* inferior. Jesus is God! Completely equal in every way *with* God yet He subjects Himself to the Father. *Why? Because God has ordained not an order of authority (as if to say the Father is the greatest, the Son is not quite on par w/the Father & the Holy Spirit isn't quite on par w/the Son), not they're all completely equal. But God has ordained the operations of authority.*

So to in the home. There is a mission that God has ordained for a married couple & we place ourselves *under* that mission. We're submitted to God & in so being, wives submit to your own husbands... You're not inferior to your husband, you're placing yourself under the mission that God has for your marriage. (& Just so you know this isn't the only place the bible speaks of the wife's role in this. It's also found in Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1Pet. 3:1.)

*Now we also see the sphere of the wives submission here. It's to your own husband. There is no command whatsoever, anywhere in the bible, of a general submission of women unto men in society. There is a submission in the home, & in the order of the church. But if you want to be the president of the U.S. than knock yourself out. Be it politics, business, education or any other field, no limitations.*

But submit to your own husbands (notice) "as to the Lord." What does that mean? It's a critical phrase isn't it? Because it influences everything else that we understand about this passage.

*Let me just tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that you place your husband on par w/the Lord & just as if he were the Lord, you submit to him. You know, you submit to God in everything w/out question, so you submit to your husband in that same sense. The person who sees this scripture in this light believes that "as to the Lord" describes the extent of the submission.* However, (though it's true the wife should render a great deal of respect to her husband) the bible in no place requires anyone to render submission to anyone else in every way w/out question (be it to employers, governments or whatever) the only exception to that being God Himself. To render submission w/out question in every way to anyone w/the exception of God is really on par w/idolatry. It puts someone in the place of God in my life...

*Here's something else it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that wives should submit to their husbands as long as they know he's doing what the Lord wants.*

That interpretation seeks to define the *limit* of submission. The problem comes in that then it becomes the wife's responsibility to determine if his direction or decision is of the Lord... So the wife reasons like this, "If I believe your direction/decision is godly I'll submit, if I don't I won't." Ultimately what that boils down to is the fact that you'll submit as long as you can agree. Can I just tell you that (apart from those who are cantankerous & argumentative world w/out end) submission is only *tested* when I *don't* agree.

So this isn't describing the extent of submission, nor the limit of submission. What then does it define? Listen, the *motive* of my submission. It's *unto*, or a rendered act of obedience to... the Lord. So the wife's submission isn't really something she does primarily for her husband (though again she certainly should respect him & honor him). But her act of submission is something she does primarily for the *Lord*. It's that you might be found well-pleasing in *His* sight. That you might glorify *Him* in your obedience to His word...

But listen to the other side of this as well. What that means is that when a believing wife *doesn't* submit to her own husband (as unto the Lord), she's not only falling short as a wife. She's falling short as a follower of J.C.

Now stay tuned. I told you that it has nothing to do w/being inferior or anything else. You don't submit to your husband because he's more intelligent, more gifted or capable. But because you're going to honor J.C. You don't even submit to your husband because you believe he's right, but because Jesus is right & you're going to honor Him.

Your husband may very well be wrong. You've given him your advice, he's opted to go a different direction, what do you do? You submit to that... Because God will hold *him* accountable for that. But do you see now why there's to be such care taken in considering whom you're going to marry? Don't look for an attractive man (that's just a bonus). Don't look for a wealthy man, or a romantic man, look for a godly man whom you can respect...

Because when you say, "I do" what you're saying is that you've counted the cost & you're willing to place yourself under this man's headship for the rest of your life in order to glorify J.C. Because your flesh (I don't want to) & his foolishness will not circumnavigate the divine design for marriage...

## Vs 23

When Paul says, "For the", what's happening there is that he's giving you an explanation. I think we can all agree, that the command given to the wives in Vs 22 is a difficult command to fulfill. It's no light thing. God knows that as well. So He allows us a little insight into "why". He *owes us* no explanation whatsoever.

Yet in His compassion He *wants us* to understand the guiding principle behind it. Now the 1<sup>st</sup> reason for a Christian wife's submission to her husband is in Vs 22. It's in order to honor & glorify Jesus (as to the Lord).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason is found in the order of creation. Vs 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife." When he speaks of the "head", again the idea is one of authority. (The head of the company is the authority of the company, the head of the organization is the final authority of the organization). It speaks to the appropriate responsibility to lead and the *matching* accountability. When you're under the head of the company, it's appropriate to *submit to the head*. God has created the husband to be the "head" of the wife. Paul points this out in 1 Cor 11 & 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2 in saying, "*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*"<sup>3</sup> The scriptures also emphasize the fact that the woman was created *from* the man to show her connection *to* & completion *of* the man.

All of this happened *prior to the fall*, it's not part of the curse, it's the divine design. God ordained roles for the husband, & the wife before the fall ever took place. Now the fall certainly placed a strain on it (& God acknowledged that in Gen Ch 3), but God's plan for our marriages didn't change due to the fall.

& There is a general (almost instinctual) global understanding of the man's headship in the marriage union. That's why when you get married (again not categorically, but the vast majority) the woman forfeits her name & takes on the man's. They don't come up w/a new name for them both to agree upon. The woman says, "I'm coming under his headship, I'm taking his name."

So reason #1 for the wives submission? It's her service unto the Lord. #2 The order of creation (the husband is the head of the wife). When Paul says, "& He is the Savior of the body." How does that correlate to the husband & wife? It depends on how you interpret the word "Savior". If you're looking at it from a strict "salvation" perspective, you have to see this as simply an emphasis of who Christ is (He is our salvation).

If you see it as Paul used it in 1 Timothy 4:10 where he said, "*...we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.*"<sup>4</sup> Then you see it as more of a "common grace" application whereby everyone lives & moves & has there being because of the grace of God toward us all. In that sense the husband is the "savior" of his wife in that it's his responsibility to tend to & take care of her, to protect & provide for her (which leans into Vs 29). However you want to understand it, it doesn't change the emphasis of the passage.

<sup>3</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Ti 2:13) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Ti 4:10) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



## Vs 24

Reason #3. The wife should submit to her husband because it's a model of the union between Jesus & the church. If the wife doesn't really *want* a leader in "team marriage union", then she doesn't understand a biblical marriage & will always be working against it in some form or fashion. That would be like a believer saying he really doesn't want Jesus as his head... It's counterproductive.

& When the wife resists the headship of her husband, it's like your body acting independently of your head. That's an indication of something unhealthy, not something advanced or more modern... Perhaps you've had a stroke, so your body doesn't respond to your head. That's not good, it's bad.

Now certainly the head needs the body, but the body needs the head. Nothing inferior about one or the other, just different roles.

I should also qualify what's said here in Vs 24. When Paul says, "Be subject to your husband in everything." Context is everything. Is there ever a time when it's appropriate for a wife not to submit to her husband? Of course there is (remember unqualified, absolute submission is idolatry).

If your husband is asking you to do something illegal? Submit to God & do the right thing, not your husband & do the wrong thing. What you consider a bad decision isn't grounds to do refuse to submit. But something sinful is. If your husband has lost his mental capacity or is medically incapacitated, you're free from submission in those cases. If your husband is physically abusive, he endangers your safety or the safety of your children... don't submit to his sinful violence.

If your husband commits adultery & breaks his marriage bond. You don't have to submit to that & simply accept it & allow it to continue. You're biblically free to come out from under his "rank" at that point.

Wise is the man who will listen to his wife & take what she says to heart. Weigh it in the balance & if she's right, she's right. If he goes another direction, support him, encourage him, let him learn to lead & God will honor it.

Now if Paul had stopped here it would be easy for the wife to feel that all the obligations were on her, he didn't (though we will for now). However there are obligations upon the husband as well. Both are called to die to self, both are called to sacrifice, both are to see their marriage as a model of Jesus' relationship to the church. Today we've considered the wife's role, next week the husband's.

**Prayer Points:**

Father we thank You for Your word. That not only have you ordained order, structure for Your people, You've graciously given us the "why" behind the "what" You've called us to obey. We *want* to honor You, to submit ourselves *to* You & to glorify You in our lives. Father I pray for the wives, the wives to be, pour Your Spirit out upon them, be glorified *in* them as they honor You in their obedience to You.

As a church we're called to submit ourselves to J.C. But before we were called to that He loved us, & gave Himself *for* us upon the cross. Jesus shed His blood, paid the penalty of our sin, that we might be reconciled to Him. If you need Christ to come into your life, to forgive your sin that you might come under His headship & be given new life today, than believe on Him even now. Turn from your sin, submit your life to Christ & He'll make you new...