

## **The Wife's Role**

### **Ephesians 5:22-24**

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Follow with me, Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord,"—why?—"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body." Look at verse 24, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." This is one of the clearest and most definitive word to wives about their role. I know that submission is not en vogue, so for me to even read this verse is really kind of antithetical to a culture in which we live. But Christianity is counterculture; and it's not God's Kingdom to follow the world, we're following God's Word. Amen? We need to be disciples of His Word and obedient to His Word.

How do we have happy, healthy marriages in a confused, corrupt, and ever-changing culture that we live in? We saw marriage as God created it, marriage as Satan has corrupted it, we saw the fall of man and how it affected marriage and the relationship, we saw the culture deteriorating at the end of time, the last days, so how do we have a happy, blessed, and healthy successful marriage? I would actually narrow it down to just one statement, that is, by being obedient to the Bible, the Word of God. It really is that simple. God has given to us His manual, His roadmap, His instructions. When we disregard God's Word, we will pay a price for it, and we are seeing that in our culture today. We cannot turn our back on God and His Word, disregard His principles and His precepts, and expect to prosper or flourish in our nation. The marriage union is that which forms the family union—the home, the Christian home—is the bedrock of our culture and our society.

I want to look together with you from the Bible and see what the roles for the husband, for the wives are. Tonight we look first at the role of the wives. Now, I'm going to mention all of my three main points. I've tried to take what I could from the New Testament and put it in three main points. Those three main points are (and we're going to go back over each one): 1) wives love your husbands, 2) wives submit to your husbands, 3) wives respect your husbands.

Years ago, when I first taught this series (I've taught it now for the third time), I actually referred to it as wives' duties not wives' roles, and I did it with great intention because in our culture today everyone is demanding their rights. No one is seeing that they have a responsibility or a duty. The minute you hear the word "duty," you think it takes it out of the realm of love and respect and that kind of a thing that, "Uh, I just gotta do it. It's my duty, my wifely duty," but that doesn't mean you can't be motivated by love for God and love for your husband. So, we put it in three words: love, submit, respect. Let's go over these three tonight.

First of all, love your husbands, and we see that in Titus 2:4. Forgive me, I don't normally spring from my text the minute I start preaching, I usually stay in the text, but I wanted to be more comprehensive. You don't need to turn there, you can if you want to, but it says, "The aged women...that they teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands," and I emphasize this at the top because we hear only that husbands are to love their wives. I don't

know if you found that to be true—wives submit, husbands love; wives submit, husbands love; wives submit, husbands love. The Bible actually tells us that wives are to love their husbands. If you have a problem with that, even broader the Bible says love your enemy, right?, not saying; but if you're to love your enemy, why wouldn't you love your husband, right? How much more should we love our husbands.

The word "love" there in Titus, I love it, "The aged women...teach the young women to be sober," this is sober minded about the things of God, about the Word of God, to take seriously their role as a woman of God, and he says that they're to teach them, "...to love their husbands." If you look at the text, "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home...", and "...to love their husbands." Women are to love their husbands. What a novel thought. Wives, after your love for God, your love for your husband is to be next in priority. Love God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and all of your mind. You should love God in a way of preeminence over your husband. Never ever, ever let anything rival your love for God. Be careful that your love for your children, maybe your love for some craft or hobby or other things, whatever it might be (I don't need to go down the list) should never take the place of your love for God and your love for your husband. I'm convinced that the priority for a husband as well is to love God with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love his wife as he loves himself. That is on the top of the list for both the husband and wife.

You can do a whole study on the word "love." It's a Greek word *agape*, which is a sacrificial, self-denying, giving love. I like the definition that it seeks the highest good of the object loved. *Agape* love seeks the highest good of the object loved, so if you're a wife who loves her husband, you want his good, you want God's will in his life. You're not thinking about yourself, you're thinking about your husband and what is best for him and what is good for him.

I love what Warren Wiersbe said, "Love is not a passing emotion, it is a continual devotion." So often we think of love as being an emotion, and emotions come and go. Amen? Anyone that has been married for any length of time knows that you don't wake up every morning after 40 years of marriage singing, "I love you!" with a little robin bird singing a song in the window of the kitchen and the sun glistening off the eggs as you prepare them for your husband. It doesn't always happen like that, but you make a choice. Love is a decision you make. It's a verb, an action word, to seek the highest good of your husband, the object loved, not what's good for me, what do I want, I gotta find myself, this man's holding me down and holding me back, I just gotta be free, I gotta be me, I gotta do what I want. You promised to love your husband in sickness and in health, richer or for poorer, until death do you part. Remember the vows that you took, remember that, and you make a commitment to follow through on those vows.

Also realize that this *agape* love described in 1 Corinthians 13 (you should take note of that and read it) is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as well. Galatians says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." In Ephesians 5:18 (we saw it last week), "...be filled with the Spirit," right? That's the most important ingredient in your marriage. A Spirit-filled marriage will produce the love of God in the person's heart.

The second role or duty of the wife, this is the one we see so much preached on or hear so much about, it's the main point in the text, is submission. Look at verse 22 again, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord,"—gives the rationale—"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

In the Greek (and I don't know why I let you know this, but I guess I should) the word "submit" is not in verse 22. That kind of freaks some people out. Some of the ladies are saying, "Oh, praise Jesus! I'm so glad I came tonight!" I remind you that in the Greek there were no chapter/verses, and there's no break between verses 21 and 22. Go back one verse and read it, "Submitting,"—there's the word—"yourselves one to another,"—this is a mutual submission—"in the fear of God,"—and without skipping a beat or taking another breath—"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Submission is implied clearly in the text, so the translators put it in there, not following the strict interpretation of the Greek. There are other passages, Colossians and so forth and even here in the Scriptures, where they are to respect their husbands or, verse 33, "...reverence her husband," which is actually a synonym for the idea of submission. It's another way of talking about being submitted to your husband and loving them, seeking their highest good. I have no doubt but what that verse 22 is telling wives to be subject to their husbands.

Now, as I said, it is first mutual, "...in the fear of God...as unto the Lord," but I want to mention three relevant truths that we learn from the Bible. Before we understand what it means for a wife to submit, I want to talk about what the Bible does clearly teach. I got this from John Stott many years ago in his commentary on Ephesians, and I think it's important to keep us in balance as we interpret this idea of submission. First, it involves the dignity of womanhood, childhood, and servanthood. The Bible is very, very clear. It dignifies womanhood, it dignifies childhood, and it dignifies servanthood.

It's interesting that in Ephesians 5:18, "...but be filled with the Spirit," the consequences of being filled with the Holy Spirit run all the way through the rest of the book of Ephesians. Being filled with the Holy Spirit means a wife will be subject to her husband, it means a husband will love his wife, it means that children will obey their parents, it means that parents will not provoke their children to anger, it also means that servants will be obedient to their masters, and masters will give respect to their servants. All of the rest of Ephesians, even the spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6, is in light of we're Spirit-filled believers and so the implication is there in that text.

The Bible does affirm the dignity of womanhood, childhood, and servanthood. Those that say, "Well, the Bible teaches that women are nothing, and they should be subjected and submit, belittles women." Nothing could be further from the truth. Christianity especially elevates woman to a rightful place. In the Greco-Roman culture, if you understand anything about it, women were subjected, women were despised. Even in the Jewish culture, the Hebrew culture, an orthodox Jewish man would wake up every morning and say, "God, I thank You that I'm not a

Gentile, and I thank You that I'm not a woman." They would actually pray that.

In the Greco-Roman culture, many times when a baby was born they would lay the baby before the father. If the father picked the child up, then he wanted to keep it; if he turned his back and walked away, they would discard that child. Many little baby girls were thrown into the rubbish heap. Jesus stopped and talked to the woman of Samaria, and of course His relationship with Mary and Martha, and gave dignity and respect to womanhood, so the Bible is not anti-woman, -childhood, or -servanthood. It doesn't really promote or encourage or teach slavery by any means.

Secondly, the Bible teaches the equality before God of all human beings because each is made in the image of God. If we're going to talk about submission, let's remember that both men and women, male and female, are made in the image of God. This is why I went back and started in the book of Genesis, and we're going to go to Matthew 19 in a few weeks where Jesus said that God, "...made them male and female," so that they complement one another, but there's an equality in that we're all made in the image of God, even though there's a role for us to fulfill.

Thirdly, it teaches the unity of all Christians as fellow members of the family of God or the church, the body of Christ. Women and men have an equal standing before God in Christ. The Bible says that in the church, "...there is neither male nor female." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." There's no hierarchy in our relationship to God—God doesn't hear a man's prayer more quickly than a woman's prayer or hear a woman's prayer more quickly than a man's prayer. Men and women equally are made in the very image and likeness of God, but that doesn't eliminate the fact that God made them unique and made them to complement one another and to fulfill their roles as husbands and wives. We misunderstand the concept of submission because we misunderstand the overarching teaching of Scripture.

Let's look at what submission is not real quickly. Submission is not: 1) It's not another word for inferiority. The minute you hear the word "submit," you're thinking dictatorship. You're thinking, You're trying to rule over me and tell me what to do, and That's not right, and I'm free to do as I please. We think that it's kind of another word for inferiority—that man is more important than women. It does not mean that the wife is inferior to her husband. Remember, we're all called, verse 21, to submit, "...one to another in the,"—mutual—"fear of God." 2) Submission does not mean slavish obedience to a dictator just barking out orders. If any husband is trying to take advantage of his wife and be a dictator (we'll talk about that in a second), that's not biblical headship, that's dictatorship, and it's not taught in the Bible. It's very subtle, but it's interesting, when he speaks to children he tells them to obey their parents. When he speaks to wives, he doesn't say, "Obey your husband," he says, "Submit to your husband." There's a difference in that we submit as unto the Lord with the purpose of helping and assisting our husband to be all that God has called him to be.

Thirdly, submission does not mean that the wife must obey ungodly counsel or commands. If your husband says, "We're going to go rob a bank together. Submit. I just saw the movie

Bonnie and Clyde, and I think that's what we should do," just tell him to go jump in a lake, in Jesus' name. You're not going to do that. Write down Acts 5:29, where the apostles were told they couldn't preach in the name of Jesus anymore. They said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." You don't have to do what your husband says to do if it's breaking God's commandments or breaking the law of the land.

What does the word "submit" mean? It literally means to arrange under, that's what it means. It means to voluntarily put yourself in the place of helping by arranging yourself under. Yes, it's true that it comes from the military, but that doesn't mean the husband is to bark out orders and the wife is to say, "Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Whatever you say." It means that you voluntarily, lovingly arrange yourself under your husband. Lenya Heitzig, wife of my friend Skip Heitzig, (I thought I would quote a woman to back me up tonight) defined it as relinquishing your rights to serve a greater purpose. I love that. Relinquishing your rights to serve a greater Person. Remember Philippians 2:5 (we studied on Sunday morning), "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," how He emptied Himself, "...and took upon him the form of a servant...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Why wouldn't you want to be like Jesus? We all should want to be like Him. The wives should want to serve her husband; a husband should want to serve his wife. "Make me more like You, Lord Jesus," should be our prayer and desire. What does it mean? It means to arrange yourself under.

Secondly, how is a wife to submit to her husband? This is so important. It's right there in the text, verse 22, "...as unto the Lord." It is as unto the Lord. This is the mission of submission. Let me say it right now, I'm kind of getting ahead of myself, but the more spiritual you are, Ephesians 5:18, I believe the more submissive you become and more like Jesus—both the husband and the wife. The more spiritual he is, the more he subjects himself to the needs of his wife and seeking to please the Lord by ministering to his wife. It's like loving himself, his own body (we'll get there in the next two weeks). Please note that in verse 22, "...as unto the Lord." That's the mission of submission. Write down Colossians 3:18, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." In Ephesians it is, "...as unto the Lord;" in Colossians 3:18, it's "...as it is fit in the Lord," so your mission is to be doing what God has called you to do.

What Christian, Spirit-filled wife wouldn't want to please the Lord, wouldn't want to glorify God, wouldn't want to honor God? You're doing it as unto the Lord. Sometimes it's going to be hard to submit to your husband, if you get your eyes on him and get your eyes off of the Lord, so keep your eyes on the Lord. It's done out of a love and for obedience to the Lord. The more spiritual you are, the more you will be submissive.

Hold your finger here in Ephesians 5, and if you can, flip with me to 1 Peter 3. I want to read and make a few comments on verses 1-6. Peter says, "Likewise, ye wives,"—so here he's speaking to wives—"be in subjection to your own husbands,"—the very same statement, Paul says it, Peter says it—"that, if any obey not the word,"—this passage specifically singles out a Christian wife who has a non-Christian husband, so you're a Christian wife, but your husband is not a believer in Jesus, you're still to be submitting to him—"that, if any obey not the word,"—

that's a description of the fact that he's not a Christian—"they also may without the word,"—or a word—"be won by the conversation of the wives." Instead of preaching to them, you're supposed to live the life before them. Verse 2, "While they behold your chaste conversation,"—your pure manner of living—"coupled with fear,"—that's reverence for God.

Verse 3, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel,"—that doesn't mean you shouldn't take care of yourself or wear nice things, it just means that's not what your purpose or main goal is—"But let it be the hidden man,"—person—"of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament,"—I love this—"of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." That, "...meek and quiet spirit," again, is that heart of submission as unto the Lord. Verse 5, "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement."

Your purpose is to be submitted to your husband. You say, "Well, my husband is not a Christian. He's not a believer, so I don't have to be submitted to him." Yes you are to be submitted to him, and you're to live Christ in the home, pray for your husband, in such a way that they see Christ in you, and that they can be won by the way that you live. You are clearly called to be subject to your husband.

Go back with me to Ephesians 5, so you submit, "...as unto the Lord." It won't always be easy to submit to your husband, but you do it, "...as unto the Lord." That's the mission of submission. It takes faith, it takes the filling of the Holy Spirit, and I really believe, too, that trusting the Lord is so very important, trusting the Lord. Whoever trusts in the Lord will not be put to shame. If you trust in the Lord and you obey the Lord, God will actually defend and take care of you.

Let me ask another question. Why should a wife submit to her husband? I don't draw this all from my text, but I'm going to rip off four reasons why a wife should submit to her husband. The list could be a lot longer. First, because it's what the Bible teaches. We could stop right there, right? "Well, why should I submit?" Well, for starters, it's in the Bible. The B-I-B-L-E, Yes that's the book for me, right? You can't pick and choose what you want to be obedient to in the Bible. Secondly, it's pleasing to the Lord. I read it in Colossians 3:18. It pleases the Lord, Ladies. Thirdly, it's good for your marriage and your children, not to mention the church and the nation.

Years ago I discovered a book called, Marriage and the Public Good. It's actually not a Christian book. There's a lot of sociologists, psychologists, and people who study culture and so forth and doctors who did research about marriage and the issue of public good. One little statement I'll lift out of this quote said, "The family structure that helps the children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in low-conflict marriage." All the scientific studies, all the scientific research supports, which we are so blatantly and rebelliously rejecting against God, that children thrive best, and so does culture and society, when you have two biological parents committed to one another in love in the home raising children, children flourish. The

statistics are overwhelming. If you can find the book, it's been long out of print, it's a little booklet called, Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles, it'll just blow your mind the study that's been done on the value and the importance of marriage.

One of the most tragic things ever to happen in American history is when the government sought to redefine marriage in the United States of America. It's the beginning of the end. You can't survive. And, we even have easy divorce laws. I saw a car this morning that had on the windshield: "Do yourself divorce," and gave the phone number. "Easy, quick divorce. Do it yourself, we'll help you through it," advertised on the windshield. We're going to talk about divorce, as a whole message one evening, but God did not design marriage for divorce. It's God's concession to human sin, the hardness of people's hearts. Jesus said, "From the beginning it's not God's will. God didn't design marriage for you to put away your wives, from the beginning."

So, it's that the Bible teaches, it's pleasing to the Lord, it's good for your children, good for your family, good for your marriage; and fourthly, because the husband is the head of the wife. Look at the text, Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body," headship of the husbands. So, verse 22, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands...For the husband is the head of the wife." It speaks of care, it speaks of protection, it speaks of provision. It doesn't speak of dominance or control.

Here's another little footnote. His headship is based on two things: 1) creation, and 2) redemption. Write down 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 and 1 Timothy 2:13. It's not culture, not chauvinism, but creationism. I think, again, the damage that's been done in our culture by teaching evolution, what do you expect but the decay and destroying of our culture if we teach our kids from the time they're born that they're just accidents—they just happened by mistake, they're just evolved, and they can keep evolving. They can evolve from different genders now. We have all these multiple genders, we don't know what's a male and a female. We don't know what marriage is anymore. We're completely confused because we've taught evolution, we've rejected God and His Word, we're reaping what we've sown.

Notice verse 23 of the text, "...even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." Marriage reflects Christ's redemptive purpose and plan. Marriage is a reflection of God's nature, so an attack on marriage is an attack on God Himself. Headship is saviorship. It speaks of care, responsibility, protection, and provision. A husband should care, protect, and provide for his wife, and, obviously as we're going to see in the text, love, agape his wife, "...as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

I want you to note, verse 24, Paul's summary on submission, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." I'm just reading it. Don't shoot the messenger. You can go get another Bible if you want, get whatever translation you want, it's in the Bible. If you don't like that, talk to God about it. Don't blame me. He summarizes this, "...as the church is subject,"—submits—"unto Christ, so let the wives

be,”—submitted—“to their own husbands.” It’s a reflection of Christ and the church. Likewise, let the wives be in subjection to their own husbands, so we want to picture in our marriages the relationship of Christ and the church. Doesn’t Jesus love the church? You bet He does! Didn’t Jesus give His life for the church? Doesn’t He nourish and cherish the church? It says that right there in Ephesians 5, which actually means to warm with body heat. I love that picture! To nourish and cherish the church, so wives should be nourished and cherished.

Also, this statement in verse 24 is in the present tense, so it’s to be continuous and ongoing, not sporadic. It’s also comprehensive. It’s continuous, it’s in the present tense, and it’s comprehensive, “...in every thing.” Sometimes a wife, when she hears her husband say, “Let’s go out to dinner tonight.” “Yes, sweetheart, I submit.” “Let’s go shopping and buy you some new clothes.” “Yes, I will submit. Let’s go.” “Could you make some mashed potatoes for me this week?” “Rebuke you, devil! Get behind me, Satan.” You pick and choose the areas that you’ll submit on and not submit. It says, “...in every thing.” Now, not sinful things, not ungodly or wicked things, but those things that are within the realm of God’s calling and purpose for you as a wife.

Here’s my last point, and I won’t tarry on it, the last half of verse 33. We have to jump down to the close of this section, respect your husband. So, love your husband, submit to your husband, respect your husband. Verse 33, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself,”—that’s a high standard for husbands—“and the wife see that she reverence,”—respects—“her husband,” so, love, submit and respect. It speaks of reverence or respect for your husband. As I said earlier, I believe that this is a summary. All three—love, submit, and respect—are summarized in this respect concept.

A lot of wives do not respect their husbands. They say, “Well, they’re not respectable.” I know that’s a challenge, but try to find something that you can tell your husband that you appreciate. Instead of attacking him for the things that are negative, wrong, or bad, tell him qualities that you value, that you appreciate, and that you respect him for that. There are no conditions—saved or unsaved—the wife should love, submit, and respect her husband.

You might say, “But, I believe that it’s the right thing to do, it’s just something I can’t do. You don’t know my husband. Had my husband been alive when Paul wrote this text, he wouldn’t have put it in the Bible. It would be omitted.” No, no, no, no. Do you know that a principle is true that what God calls us to do, God gives us the ability to do it. God doesn’t tell us to do something and then get back and laugh at us saying, “Hahahah! I told these wives to submit. Ain’t no way it’s ever going to happen.”

When Jesus was in the synagogue one time, there was a man with a withered hand. His hand was withered up. Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, “Stretch forth your hand.” Well, he can’t, it’s crippled! What a cruel thing for Jesus to say to this poor, crippled man, “Stretch forth your hand.” But when Jesus tells us to do something, ours is to obey. What does the Bible say? The man stretched forth his hand and it was whole, healed just like the other one. If you’ll take a step of faith and be obedient to God, “Stretch forth your hand,” God will heal your

marriage. God can heal your marriage. God can work in his heart, but it's certainly not going to take place if you don't believe and trust in God and obey His Word. It's so important to be obedient to the Lord.

You say, "Well, I don't think my husband will change." That's not your concern, that's not your job. You're not called by God to mold and shape your husband, you're called by God to be obedient to His Word. I didn't mention it, but what the wives are commanded to do should be the focus of the wife, not the husband. All the husbands know the wives' verses; all the wives know the husband's verses. They've got them memorized and can quote them in the Greek. Powerful! These are verses for the wives. If you're young here tonight, you're not married or are single, before you get married, read your Bible. Know what's involved. Be ready. Be obedient to God.

I love John 13:13-17 when Jesus was in the upper room, after He washed the disciples feet, what a picture of servanthood! What a picture of self-denial. He got down and washed the disciples feet. Do you know what Jesus said? He said, "...happy are ye if ye do,"—likewise. I believe that Jesus was encouraging all of us to be servants, and He says you'll be blessed or you'll be happy. Amen?