

Ephesians 5:22—Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

No institution or organization functions effectively void of submission, for submission suggests authority. In fact, insufficient submission within any area of society yields persistent chaos. Consider as well that as Genesis 2 came to a close, all of nature coexisted in a state of bliss—totally submitted to the Creator’s authority. This state remained until man’s rebellion (Genesis 3:6) spawned a curse upon man and creation (Genesis 3:16-18; Romans 8:19-22). But pay special attention to Genesis 3:16, where God said to Eve:

...*“I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”*
(Genesis 3:16)

The phrase, *“yet your desire shall be for your husband,”* is not related to emotional or physical attraction, for Adam and Eve were attracted to one another before the fall. The *“desire”* alluded to here concerns Eve’s craving to usurp her husband’s authority and rule supreme in the relationship—a foreign mindset before the fall. This truth is confirmed by statements regarding Cain in Genesis 4:7:

“If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7)

Sin’s *“desire”* was to control Cain (to rule over Cain). Because *“desire”* is from the same Hebrew word in both Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7, these passages verify that Eve desired to rule over Adam subsequent to the fall. Yet, Eve, regardless of her level of determination, would not succeed. Why? The last phrase of Genesis 3:16 states, *“and he shall rule over you”*—*“rule”* pointing to Adam’s enhanced authority over Eve not present before the fall. From this point, woman would desire to rule over man, but man would prevail (Genesis 3:16). Previously, Adam and Eve had lived in mutual submission, along with submission to the Father.

The solution to the above-mentioned dilemma is Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Only the Triune God can instruct husbands and wives in the way of meaningful relationships—how to live together in mutual submission, doing everything for the betterment of the other person. The three Persons of the Godhead have interacted in this fashion from eternity past? (You may want to review our discussion concerning the principle of the cross earlier in the study.)

When the chain of command is disrupted in marriage, bad things happen. For instance, a strong, unyielding wife many times produces a passive husband. Then later in life, when she realizes her need for a masculine anchor, her love turns sour due to her husband’s passivity. Women were not made to dominate. When they do, they eventually despise the environment their dominance has generated.

Leadership built on truth is authoritative in nature. Leadership based on error is feeble in nature. Only God-ordained leadership can withstand the pressures accompanying a God-ordained responsibility. Hence, a domineering wife is ill equipped to function as the head of the home. True authority is attained through submission to authority, thus a wife’s dominance prevents the God-ordained authority (the husband) from functioning according to design. Deficient instruction and discipline result, bringing confusion to the entire household. Homosexuality and lesbianism among the offspring can be traced to this reversal of roles among parents.

Let's attempt to put everything in perspective. Submission to authority does not mean that the submitting party is inferior to the one submitted to (Galatians 3:28). Submission is basically an acknowledgment of God's order, for individuals don't have to be alike to be equal. God didn't make another man from Adam's rib; he made a woman, a person unlike Adam. But it took Eve to make Adam complete—validating her value and significance. Consequently, when a wife functions in her God-ordained role, she completes her husband. Otherwise, she cripples him, never reaching her potential as a wife and mother. No husband or wife can parent according to design void of the submission addressed here.

If, due to the husband's disobedience, mutual submission is absent, the wife can submit knowing that God will honor her obedience. God is not as free to work in the husband's life should she respond otherwise. To submit to the husband "*as to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:22) is key, especially during the hard times. For a superb lesson on the power of submission, read Matthew 8:5-10.

Ephesians 5:23—For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Because marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with the church, this passage by no means grants the husband a license to mistreat his wife. For the husband to say, "I am your head, therefore bow," totally contradicts the context of Paul's statement here. This verse emphasizes submission on both Christ and the husband's part. Jesus, our "*head*," our leader, our God, lived and died for what we (His bride) received through the cross—not for what He gained through that awesome display of selflessness (John 17:19; Ephesians 5:25-27). He, as our "*head*," submitted to death for our sake—for the benefit of His bride-to-be. In return, the Father gave Him a bride-to-be who enjoys submitting to Him through her own choices.

No God-fearing wife regrets submitting to a husband who has adopted Christ's perception of marriage. Satisfied, fulfilled, and joyful wives dwell in homes where loving husbands lead—the same relationship that exists between Christ and the church. Christ doesn't force us to submit. He waits patiently until we choose to submit. His kindness and love, not His wrath, encourage us to walk in this sustained submission (Romans 2:4; Galatians 5:6; 2Corinthians 5:14-15).

A husband's response to his wife greatly affects his fellowship with the Father:

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1Peter 3:7)

Thus, unity between husband and wife yields greater blessing on both parties by enhancing the husband's fellowship with the Father. His enriched prayer life and resulting spiritual growth mold him into the leader his household requires—making mom and dad's relationship amazingly intriguing to their children's watchful eye. Children raised in these environments retain what they have witnessed, seeking spouses desiring to duplicate what mom and dad displayed at home.

Some husbands refuse to lead, leaving the family vulnerable before the enemy. Our Leader, Jesus, watches over those under His care. Husbands, as the head of the home, should jump at the opportunity to do the same. Not only do the wife and children benefit, but the family, when properly led, portrays how Christ cares for His own. Men, I don't know about you, but I want my relationship with my family to make a statement. I want it to shout to the world that Christ brings

fulfillment to all who believe. For this hope to come to fruition, we must love as Jesus loves—something we “catch” as we pursue Him in truth, righteousness, and holiness.

Ephesians 5:24—But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

The wife is to be subject to her husband as the church is subject to Christ. How can this be without the wife feeling slighted? Simple! The husband loves her for what she receives from the relationship (as Jesus loves the church), freeing her to willingly “*subject*” herself to the husband in “*everything*.” In fact, she welcomes the opportunity to serve such a worthy and loving partner.

Wonderful things transpire in situations such as these. Selflessness rules the home, the children live in a stable environment inundated with peace, and Christ’s relationship to His body, the church, is on display for all to see.

Ephesians 5:25—Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;

A husband is to love his wife as Christ “*loved the church*.” Notice that the wives are commanded to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24), but the husbands are commanded to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25). This arrangement is necessary for proper family function.

“The most important thing a father can do for his children is love their mother” (Theodore Hesburgh).¹ But how can a husband properly love his wife if he misunderstands Christ’s love for the church? Could this be the problem within Christian marriages today? If the typical husband within the Christian community views Jesus as unloving, just waiting to pounce on every act of disobedience with a full measure of His wrath, how can he fulfill his role as a loving, sensitive, compassionate friend to his wife? Hence, we must teach men who they are in Christ (what Christ’s love has done for them through the cross). For the family to function as prescribed in these passages, we have no other option.

Wives, what if you were loved by your husband as 1Corinthians 13 prescribes? Would “*submission*” be an unsettling word to you? Of course not! Jesus’ love for His body and bride (in dying on the cross) was not based on selfishness. It was based upon what the bride would receive through that glorious act. Therefore, if we love as Christ loves, we will love Him for what He received through the cross rather than for what we received. He received a body. Yes, Christ dying selflessly on the cross for others brought Him tremendous reward—a body and a bride. Only the spiritually mature understand this principle. Once understood, however, the believer’s love and appreciation for Christ becomes the passion of his life. In fact, he is willing to face “*whatever*” should it please Him. This same principle (and truth) applies to the family. When the husband displays unconditional, selfless love toward his “*queen*,” the fruit and reward will (in most cases) be a more mature wife committed to selfless living. The family unit, in turn, exemplifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to the glory of the Father.

Christ died for the church. In fact, He died for everyone—even those who reject His offer of salvation. We, as husbands, must die to our plans, ideas, opinions, and agenda. When two become one flesh, they die to their singleness and are alive to a life of union with a person they long to please. Thus, when a virgin loses her virginity on the wedding night, the blood shed is a sign that a covenant has been sealed and that a death has occurred. Both marriage partners, the

man and the woman, have died to their singleness and self-centeredness to live as one. In Adam's eyes, he and Eve were one (Genesis 2:23)—not two separate individuals. This union resulted in mutual submission—that is, until sin entered the picture in Genesis 3.

Ephesians 5:26—that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

The Father gave up His Son for the sake of the world—every human being (John 3:16). Yet, only those who choose to repent and believe while depraved become part of His family. In the same manner, Jesus gave up His life for all of mankind, His bride (the church—which began in Acts 2) included. He will “*sanctify*” His bride (Ephesians 5:26), for New Testament believers are totally sanctified in soul and spirit at the point of salvation/justification (Hebrews 10:10)—although their behavior is being sanctified on an ongoing basis (Hebrews 10:14) as they pursue intimacy with Christ. Hence, as Christ, through the husband, leads the wife into a deeper understanding of truth, the wife's behavioral sanctification is enhanced to the glory of the Father as she chooses to respond favorably to the truth she has been taught through her husband.

Men, let's lead in our homes, for Adam's failed leadership left Eve vulnerable to sin (Genesis 3).

Ephesians 5:27—that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

The church will be presented to Christ “*in all her glory*” as “*holy and blameless*” saints (also read Ephesians 1:4, Hebrews 9:28, and Jude 24). We were made into a finished product (in soul and spirit) at the point of salvation/justification (Romans 5:1; Romans 8:30; 2Corinthians 5:21; etc.). We were made a saint (1Corinthians 1:2), never to be more saintly in our person. The Holy Spirit's responsibility, however, is to train us to behave like saints—to live in a manner (while on earth) that validates who we became the moment we accepted Christ (Romans 8:14). But consider this! If, on a scale of one to one hundred, our behavioral efficiency only reaches sixty during our stay on earth, we will still be presented to Christ as “*holy and blameless*” saints (Ephesians 5:27). God doesn't have us on a performance-based acceptance. Therefore, enjoy this day knowing that should you exit your physical body, you will be presented without “*spot or wrinkle*” before the holy Creator (Ephesians 5:27). Yet, we must remember that sins committed before and after salvation reap consequences in this life, even though forgiven (Colossians 3:25).

If Jesus desires that the church behave in a manner that agrees with who she is in soul and spirit, a husband should desire that his wife experience optimum spiritual growth. This means that the husband must mature spiritually so as to guard, not only his wife, but his entire family.

Ephesians 5:28—So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

We confirmed earlier that Christ (as “*head*”) displays unconditional love toward His body, the church (Ephesians 5:2). We found likewise that the husband should love his wife in the same manner since he is “*head*” over her (Ephesians 5:23). As we will discover in Ephesians 5:31, two become one once they enter into the marriage covenant—they are no longer two separate individuals. Thus, if a husband loves his wife, he loves himself. If he does not love his wife, he

does not love himself. Consequently, every husband who does not respect and love his wife does not respect and love himself!

We should love our bodies, for we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14). Yet, only through knowing and trusting Christ can we properly love and accept the uniqueness of the particular “earth suit” (physical tent) that we each received. The same principle applies to the husband-wife relationship. Only through knowing and trusting Christ (and drawing his self-worth out of who God says he is) can the husband love and accept his wife as part of himself—a significant part of himself indeed.

Ephesians 5:29—for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

Society confirms that no one hates “*his own flesh*” (body), for more resources and time are spent on conditioning and caring for the body than in any previous generation. Hence, body-worship is not uncommon. However, New Testament believers are to view their “*earthly tent*” (2Corinthians 5:1-4) as “*a temple of God*” (1Corinthians 3:16), caring for it through personal hygiene, exercise, and diet. Such disciplines yield the fruit of energy and enhanced vigor. The same is true in the husband-wife relationship, the husband reaping enormous benefit from properly caring for (and responding according to) his wife’s needs. After all, they are “*one flesh*” (Ephesians 5:31).

The husband is to nourish and cherish his wife as Christ “*nourishes and cherishes*” the church (Ephesians 5:29). According to Ephesians 5:25-27, Jesus flawlessly and selflessly cares for His bride-to-be. He proved this through dying not only for her but for all mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:6)—God bestowing salvation to individuals who repent and believe while depraved. Therefore, as the husband pursues intimacy with the Son, Christ loves the wife through the husband. Jesus alone understands how a wife is to be nourished and cherished. Since “*nourishes*” (Ephesians 5:29) means “to promote health and strength,” while “*cherishes*” (Ephesians 5:29) is defined as “to impart warmth; to nurse, foster,” only husbands led of God’s Spirit and empowered by Christ exhibit these characteristics. In such cases the wife’s physical, spiritual, and emotional needs are abundantly supplied as the husband lovingly directs the home—allowing all family members to inhabit an environment promoting optimum spiritual growth.

Ephesians 5:30—because we are members of His body.

Jesus “*nourishes and cherishes...the church*” (Ephesians 5:29) because “*we are members of His body*” (Ephesians 5:30). We are also “*one spirit with Him*” (1Corinthians 6:17), which means that we share common life—His life—making us one. (This sharing of Jesus’ life does not make anyone a little Jesus.) Oh that we might comprehend the positive ramifications of being “*members of His body*” (Ephesians 5:30)!

Ephesians 5:31—For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.

Verse 31, a quote from Genesis 2:24, provides wise counsel for those contemplating marriage. The husband and wife are to “*leave*” their homes, their parents no longer serving as their primary

providers and counselors. The couple continues to love, care, and respect their fathers and mothers (and seek their input from time to time), but they must “leave...and...cleave” (Ephesians 5:31). A multitude of marriages have self-destructed due to couples failing to “cut the apron strings.”

“Cleave” (Ephesians 5:31) means “to glue together,” confirming that the bond between husband and wife exceeds the bond between child and parent. After all, the husband and wife are “one flesh.” Thus, if the husband hurts his wife he hurts himself.

Ephesians 5:32—This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

As was determined earlier, the “mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) relates to Jews and Gentiles becoming one, void of racial distinction, once placed into Christ (after repenting and believing while depraved). “This mystery is great” because New Testament saints (believers since Acts 2) make up Christ’s body, a truth that Old Testament believers failed to comprehend:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. (1Peter 1:10-11)

We must realize that this “mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) is personified by the husband-wife relationship—proving that marriage is sacred indeed.

Ephesians 5:33—Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.

Because Jesus loves us (His body) as Himself, all believing husbands should love their wives as themselves. If not, they misunderstand Who Christ is, who they are, and what He desires for all who have been joined as one.

“Respect” means “to treat with reverential obedience” (*Vine’s*).ⁱⁱ If a believing husband loves his believing wife “as himself,” the wife’s “respect” should automatically follow. Stated differently, if a husband’s decisions are for the good of his wife, rather than his own benefit (by applying the principle of the cross), his wife’s reverential submission should follow. Should it not, the wife needs to realize her error and appreciate, honor, and respect the selfless man inhabiting her home.

The Master’s blueprint for marriage never fails. Only when the blueprint is violated by one or both spouses does a marriage suffer harm.

ⁱ Hesburgh, Theodore. “Quotable Quotes,” *Reader’s Digest*, Jan. 1963, pp. 25; see also *Richard Evans’ Quote Book* (1971) pp. 11.

ⁱⁱ Vine, W.E.; Unger, Merrill F., White, William Jr. (1996). *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. Thomas Nelson. Nashville, TN. Used by permission. All rights reserved.