

### **Eph 5:22-24 Submission in Marriage**

Paul gives three examples of how this submission works in real life for wives, husbands, and kids. Since, men, women and children have different needs, Paul explains how to honor and affirm each of them. Children need instruction and guidance, women need to feel cherished and loved, and men need to lead their families.

**5:22 Wives submit to your own husbands.**--Wives are “to submit to your own husbands.” There needs to be a clear leadership structure in order to promote unity and oneness, and avoid chaos and division. Any discussion about mutual submission must include the mandate of Genesis 2:24, **“And they become one flesh.”** When you’re looking out for your spouse, you’re really looking out for yourself. And vice versa. We see a similar passage in Col 3:18 **18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.** This is submission willingly, a free choice, because it is in keeping with the instructions of God. Just as our submission to each other in the Church, or even our submission to Christ is not forced, but out of loving submission to the One who has loved us, and given Himself for us, the submission of wives to their own husbands is not forced, but out of love for God, and a willingness to obey Him. There is also no indication that this submission out of love, as a Christian in any allows a man to abdicate or shirk off his duty to lead the household, so it is very much a servant-leader kind of submission on his part. There is no indication in the household codes that the husbands are to be submissive in leadership to their wives, nor Christ to the church, nor the parents to their children. Otherwise the conflict, tension, and chaos in a household is increased. Within a family, submission is all about putting the needs of the other members of your family ahead of your own. Believers’ lives filled with the Spirit submit to one another and walk in love 5:2 **2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.** ). This is similar to Christ’s command to love one another. John 13:34-35 **34 I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.”** The Bible is clear that we are all on an equal footing in Christ. Gal 3:28 **28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** And this equality is one of the things that makes submission in a marriage more difficult! Each person has their gifts, and it’s quite possible that a wife may be able to do something better than her husband, or be better suited to achieving some goal. This is why Paul uses ὑποτάσσω, “be subject,” for the wife and not ὑπακούω, “obey,” as he does for children (6:1) and slaves (6:5), suggesting that this indicates that the wife is on an equal basis with her husband. In fact, some think that “submission” instead of obedience was a uniquely Christian term for the wife’s relationship to her husband, and elevates the role of the wife in marriage, bringing her to equality with her husband. And, this is what we see, wherever Christianity is introduced.

The one who is subject is not qualitatively inferior, no they are instead equal, and the role is as a helpmeet. This word comes from Genesis 2:18, where **“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”** The words for help-meet in Hebrew are ezer, which means to help, save, or be strong for. For example the word “ebenezer” in 1 Samuel 7:12 is used to describe the power of God’s deliverance. “Eben” means rock and “ezer” means “help” or “salvation”. Ebenezer therefore means “rock of help” or “rock of salvation”. The root “ezer” is the same word that God used to describe to Adam who Eve was. She was not intended to be just his helper or his assistant, or even companion, but God intended her to help deliver him out of problems and bad situations. Any man who has been married can attest that there have been situations where they would have made great errors in leadership or in dealing with problems, except for the good advice and even

steering of their wives. Two heads are better than one! Ecc 4:12 **12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.** This is how God intended it—as a partnership, the two becoming one—with God right in the middle of the relationship. What’s supposed to happen is that the two each grow closer to God, and that, as they do, they grow closer to each other. The second word neged is “exactly corresponding to”, like when you look at yourself in a mirror. We translate it meet, or appropriate for. It’s not that she meets his needs, it’s that she exactly corresponds to him, as in a mirror image of him. And this idea is important, since in a marriage relationship spouses are often a sounding board, or a way to help us see ourselves from a less biased perspective. God made men and women different in emphasis on different qualities, organization, and structure because all that He wanted to do with humanity was just too big to fit into one person. It takes two. The range of possibilities, opportunities, and challenges in life include areas where both genders have strength. By working together, more challenges can be met effectively, and more opportunities for growth can be taken advantage of.

**as to the Lord.**—Now, Sometimes, these verses take criticism. To modern ears, Paul’s call for the wife’s submission sounds excessively patriarchal. But when properly understood in the Greco-Roman context, Paul’s vision of marriage is extremely progressive. Paul clearly considered husbands and wives to be partners as is evidenced by his teaching on equal conjugal right. 1 Cor 7:2–4 **2 But because of sexual immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise the wife also to her husband,** a concept which was unheard of in that day. This is evidence that Paul viewed the wives as equal to husbands qualitatively even though subordinate with regard to the lines of authority.

But what about when the husband decides that he wants to disobey God, or lead his family away from God? Well, first we have to acknowledge that this makes the life of the Christian wife a whole lot more difficult! It’s bound to cause all sorts of problems in the marriage and be a continual pull in two directions. But, what it DOES NOT do is allow the wife to disregard her responsibility in either direction. Peter addresses this in 1 Peter 3:1-6 **In the same way, you wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won over without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your pure and respectful behavior.** Does that mean that a wife can’t say a word? No! But it’s saying that actions speak louder than words, and your continual commitment to God, and living as He has called you to live, in submission to both God and your husband, while the husband is going away from God is a great witness to your husband. If he loves you, then he’s going to find this a difficult situation to maintain, and it will likely, sooner or later draw him back to the Lord, or at least give him such a witness that he can’t say a word.

**<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.** Now, what if the husband just will not come into submission to God, and it’s just an awful situation. If there is abuse, addiction, affairs, or absence, then these tend to be regarded as good grounds for separation, especially if someone’s well-being is threatened. Seek God in this. Jesus’ teaching on divorce was very clear (see Matt 19:3-9). This means that the only biblical grounds for a person to completely walk away from the relationship, divorcing their spouse is sexual immorality. And, Paul echoes the need to stay married in 1 Cor 7:10-11 **10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife is not to leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband is not to divorce his wife.** The design of God for marriage is one man and one woman joined in marriage for a lifetime.

But, in this fallen world, it doesn't always work out that way. We just have to do what is right, for our part—we can't control anyone else. 1 Cor 7:12-16 **12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 15 Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us in peace.** In other words, Paul is saying that even if it is difficult, and you are pulled in two different directions, we should not divorce a spouse. And the reason is due to God's caring about the unbelieving spouse, and wanting them to have a good example of a Christian around them, so that they may realize that they should be following Jesus. And God cares about the children, wanting them to have at least one parent who loves the Lord, and lives their lives for Him—and teach the children to do so too. Now, Paul makes it clear that there may be circumstances where the spouse that does not want to follow the Lord may leave. Paul says that it may be permissible to let them leave, rather than having a house full of strife, or more or less holding someone against their will! The Christian is not under the obligation to try to force the spouse that wants to leave to stay, only to try everything to make it work out. Clearly, it's better if something can be worked out that maintains the peace, and the relationship, but sometimes both parties aren't willing to stay, and Paul says that the believer is not bound under these circumstances. It's then best to maintain as much peace and civility as possible. So, all parties are to respect the Lord in all things, striving to live up to the Biblical examples of behavior as much as is possible, including in submission to Christ, in submission to each other, and within a marriage, wives in submission to their husbands, for "it is fitting in the Lord" or, as in Eph 5:21, because "you fear Christ."