

## **Ephesians 5:22-24 Answers** **The Spirit Filled Submission of Wives**

**Introduction:** In the last lesson we discussed being filled with the Spirit. It is God's will for us to be filled with the Spirit. It is a command. This command is followed by several participles which define the result of being filled with the Spirit: singing, giving thanks and submitting. **Reread 5:21.**

Those filled with the Spirit will have a general attitude of submission to one another. We are to prefer one another in love, we are to serve one another.

ESV **Ephesians 4:2** . . . bearing with one another in love . . .

ESV **Galatians 5:13** . . . but through love serve one another.

**What reason for mutual submission did Paul offer in 5:21?** We are to do so out of reverence for Christ. It is not about the worthiness of the other person, it is about the worthiness of Christ! We are to see Jesus in those to whom we owe subjection. Our duty does not depend on their personal character (Westcott, p. 83).

This general attitude of considerate submission toward each other does not obliterate other, more specifically defined, areas of submission. Whereas we are to have a general attitude of submission each to the other, there is still to be submission of the church to its elders (Heb 13:17), wives to husbands (Ep 5:22) and children are to obey their parents. Christian slaves were still to obey their Christian masters (Ep 6:5). In today's lesson we will look at one of the particulars of submission as applied to the Christian family.

**Family Life Overview:** In this section on the family we'll see three simple guidelines for the various roles with the family: husbands love, wives submit, children obey.

-----

**\*\*\*\*Even though all believers are to have an attitude of submitting to one another, what specific situation does Paul point out in 5:22-24?** Wives are to submit to their husbands.

**Joke:** The Greek word for "own" is *idiois*, basis for the English word idiot. So, perhaps a dynamic translation would be, "wives, submit to your idiot husbands!"

**Good news!** A wife only has to submit to her *own* idiot husband, not to all men! This verse is not teaching that women in general be submissive to men in general. A woman has only to be submissive to the man who is her husband.\*

\*All Christians, male and female, are to be in submission to government authorities, employers and church leaders. In the previous verse we had mutual subjection, but in this instance the subjection is not reciprocal; it is not mutual (Lenski, p. 623).

**Culture Clash:** Many (most) Americans today find 5:22 to be quite offensive. The Bible, judged by most any contemporary standards, is a sexist book. Several times Christian couples (for whom I was performing a wedding) have asked me to leave the “obey” line out of the vows (to love, honor and obey) so as not to offend relatives attending the wedding. Yet the Scriptures are very clear at this point: Christian wives are to submit to their husband’s leadership. It is a fruit of being filled with the Spirit.

If I had written Ephesians, I would have started with the command for husbands to love their wives before I dealt with wives submitting to their husbands (it seems more palatable in that order). However, the Holy Spirit knew it was best to start with the role of a wives submitting to husbands.

ESV **Colossians 3:18** Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

ESV **Titus 2:4-5** . . . train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

**Technical Note:** There are no dedicated Greek words for wife or husband. Instead, the words woman and man do double duty, sometimes meaning simply woman and sometimes wife. The context mostly determines which it is. For instance, the possessive word “own” in front of men in 5:22 clearly flags that husbands is meant. A woman’s own man is her husband.

**1. In the Greek there is no verb in 5:22. It literally says, “the women to your own men, as to the Lord” (5:22). Why it is significant that the verb “submit” must be supplied from the preceding verse (5:21)?** See also 5:18. This shows a close link between the two verses. We are to be filled with the Spirit (5:18). One result of being filled with the Spirit is that believers will have an attitude of submission one to another out of reverence for Christ (5:22). Another result is that wives, in particular, will be submissive to their husbands (5:23). It will take the power of the filling of the Spirit for a wife to submit to her husband.

Ephesians 5:21 is clear that each believer is to have an attitude of submission to every other believer. Even though the wife in particular is to submit to her husband, the fact remains that he is also his wife’s Christian brother. Even though the husband is the head, he is still to serve his wife and esteem her as he would any other Christian in the church. He is to be a servant husband, even as church leaders are to be servant leaders.

**Word Study:** “Submit” and “submitting” (5:21-22) are from the Greek *hupotasso*; it was originally a military term. *Hupo* means under (as in hypodermic or hypothermia) or and *tasso* means to arrange; thus, to arrange under (in ranks). Imagine a military organizational chart. The word really does mean to submit.

**2. How does Jesus' submission to the Father illustrate that submission does not necessarily mean inferiority?** There is perfect equality within the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are each co-equal. Yet, Jesus voluntarily submitted to the Father's will, became a man and died on the cross for our sins. Jesus was submissive, but He is not inferior.

**What qualifier is given in 5:22 as to how wives should submit to their husbands?** They are to submit "as to the Lord".

**3. What does it mean to submit "as to the Lord" (5:22)?** Compare 5:21, 1 Peter 3:1. The wife is to regard submission to her husband as an obedience rendered to Christ (*Exegetical Greek Text*, p. 366). Similarly, 5:21 states that every Christian is to submit "out of reverence to Christ". The subjection of the wife to the husband is well pleasing to the Lord (Lenski, p. 626).

ESV 1 Peter 3:6 . . . Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.

**Disagreement:** Submission has no bite unless there is disagreement. If the wife and husband agree on everything, of course she will go along. The rub comes in when the wife thinks differently than her husband does. It is where there is disagreement that submission takes on meaning. Examples: how the household is managed, how the children are disciplined, education, how money is spent, etc.

**4. Suppose her husband is not the man God wants him to be. Why should she still submit (5:22)?** See 1 Peter 3:1. The wife's duty to submit does not depend on her husband's personal character (Westcott, p. 83). She is to submit "as to the Lord".

**Why should a wife's submission to her husband not be dependent on him being Christ-like in loving her?** Even though a husband's duty is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, the wife's duty is to submit to her husband even if he does not love her as he should. Our God given roles in marriage are not 50/50 with the women doing her part if the man does his part. Rather, the roles are 100/0. Each partner is to obey Jesus' commands regardless of the failings of the other spouse.

A wife who trusts God should have no trouble submitting to her husband, even if he is not everything God wants him to be. Why? Because God is sovereign over all things and God has instructed the wives to submit. God is in control of all things, including your husband.

**5. What advice did Peter offer women for changing a less than Christ-like husband in 1 Peter 3:1-6?** See also Proverbs 17:1, 19:13, 21:9, 27:15-16. Simply stated, a woman with horse sense won't nag! Men don't like to be lectured by their wives. Men don't need a second mother. Peter's advice is to have a respectful and quiet spirit when dealing with a wayward husband. Don't say a word; let God work on the big brute.

ESV 1 Peter 3:1-2 . . . wives, be subject to your own [*idiot!*] husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives - when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

ESV **Proverbs 19:13** . . . a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.

ESV **Proverbs 17:1** Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

ESV **Proverbs 21:9** It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

ESV **Proverbs 27:15-16** A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.

**Joyful Submission:** It takes the power of the Spirit for a wife to submit to a disobedient husband. Yet remember that another mark of being Spirit filled is joy (5:19). How a wife serves her husband is very important. She can submit coldly and with resentment, or she can submit with joy. Attitude is everything (Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, p. 54). True joy comes from serving others (not from getting your own way).

**What reason did Paul give in 5:23 for a wife to submit to her husband?** Paul stated that the wife should submit because the husband is the head of the wife. In nature, anything with no head is dead and anything with two heads is a freak!

ESV **1 Corinthians 11:3** . . . the head of a wife is her husband . . .

**6. What does head mean (5:23)?** Head is from *kephalé*; it can refer to a literal head (the uppermost part of the body that contains the brain) or metaphorically it could denote superior rank (BAGD, p. 430).

**A Feminist Out:** Feminists are fond of saying *kephalé* means source (as in the head of a river) with no reference to authority (Adam was the source of Eve since she came out of his body). However, the Greek is not used in this way and an examination of various biblical texts clearly shows that *kephalé* is used in the sense of superior rank. It is quite true that Christ is the source of the church, but it is also true that Christ is the authority over the church. It is special pleading to conclude that the Bible teaches anything other than that wives are to submit to their husbands as heads of the marriage. In any event, submit still means submit.

**Respect the Uniform:** In the military, you respect the stripes (uniform) even if you don't respect the man as a person. So too by virtue of God's family order, the husband has been delegated authority from God to be the head of the family. Even if a wife is in the sad state of not feeling respect for her husband as a person, he is still worthy of submission by virtue of the fact that he is the head (he has the stripes, the uniform).

**7. Why is it that the husband the head of the wife (5:23)?** See *1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 1 Timothy 2:12-13*. It is true simply because God has declared it so. Though Paul does not give a reason here, other places in Scripture do state additional reasons. That Adam was created before Eve suggests headship (leadership). Eve was created later to help Adam in the task that he had already been given by God. She was God's appointed helper for Adam.

**ESV 1 Timothy 2:12-13** I do not permit a woman . . . to exercise authority over a man . . . For [and here comes the reason why] Adam was formed first, then Eve . . .

**ESV 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9** . . . the head of a wife is her husband . . . man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

**What example of what it means for the husband to be the head is given in 5:23?** The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.

**8. What does it mean for Christ to be the head of the church (5:23)?** It means that he is its leader, its director, its manager. Christ has authority over the church.

**9. How does Christ as head help us understand what it means for the husband to be head (5:23)?** The husband is the head of the wife in the sense of being in authority over her just as Christ is the head of the church.

**10. Why did Paul add that the church is the body of Christ (5:23)?** See ahead to 5:28-29. Since the church is Christ's body, it is his duty as head to care for the church. Paul develops this idea more in **5:58-29** (read ahead); husbands should love and care for their wives even as they do their own bodies.

**11. Why did Paul point out that Christ is the Savior of the church (5:23)?** Christ assumed the responsibility for the sins of his bride and died on the cross to pay for her sins. He did what it took to save her. So too a godly husband will give his life (or live his life) to care for his wife and ensure her salvation in every sense of the word (emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, mentally, physically).

**“Savior” Application to Men: Is it that His bride was so sinful that Jesus had to die for her, or is it that Jesus loved his bride so much that He was glad to die for her?** Husbands must be servant heads who love their wives so much that they are glad to serve them in leading and not see them as slaves or servants (Keller, p. 55). A self centered husband will not serve his wife in the way he leads. He will be impatient, resentful, harsh, cold, irritable, lacking in graciousness, not kind in his speech, moody, distant, distracted, preoccupied, insensitive, etc.

**12. What, in 5:23, indicates that this submission transcends all cultures, customs and times?** Christ is the head of the church regardless of culture, custom or time in human history. So too, as long as Christ is the head of the church, wives are to submit to their husbands. Often I have heard people say, “Times have changed, preacher”. Times have changed, but Jesus never changes. Jesus is still the head of the church and the husband is still the head of the marriage.

**13. According to 5:24, how are wives to submit to their husbands?** Wives are to submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ. Just as there is no doubt that the church should submit to Jesus, so too a wife should submit to her husband.

**Word Study:** Although the word “submit” is missing in 5:22, it is present and accounted for in 5:24. It is the same Greek word found in 5:21 (*hupotasso*). It means exactly what the translation says, “submit”.

**Appeal:** The wife is the husband’s helpmate, not his employee. Even though wives are called upon to submit, they are still the husband’s equal (it is just that men and women have different gifts, different strengths, that are complimentary). Jesus is our Lord, yet he called us His “friends”; a master does not tell his slaves why he does what he does (but friends do). The wives are to be equal friends to their husbands. If a sister does not like or agree with something the husband has decided, she should respectfully appeal to him. **Example:** Daniel in Babylon regarding the king’s food. Talk to your husband; don’t just be mute. Give him feedback. Express your feelings. Nabal should have listened to Abigail about David. Pilate should have listened to his wife about Jesus.

**Based on 5:24, in what areas should a wife submit to her husband?** The text says “in everything”. This would include where you live (Sarah followed Abraham to Canaan), how you educate your kids (home school, public school, Christian school), where you go to church, etc.

**14. Wives are told to submit to their husbands in “everything” (5:24). What if a husband asks his wife to do something that is clearly against the commands of Christ?** See *Acts 4:18-20*. Scottish Presbyterian commentator John Eadie wrote that “everything” means everything within the proper circuit of conjugal obligation. If the husband trespasses beyond this sphere he loses his authority (Eadie, p. 413). Scripture is clear that we must obey God rather than man. However, do not let the exception become the rule. The Bible assumes that 99% of the time the Christian will be in submission to those in authority over him. It is rare that disobedience of conscience is necessary. Even then, it should be done respectfully and not in defiance.

**Looking ahead to 5:33, what additional word did Paul have for wives?** Whereas husbands are told to love their wives, wives are to respect their husbands (I guess God does not command the impossible: loving us men!). These instructions are fitting to each gender. Women need love. Men need respect.

**What does it mean to respect someone?** It means to show honor or esteem or to treat with deference or courtesy.

A wife may not feel like she respects her husband, but God calls on every wife to show respect to her husband. This respect is shown in the way you treat your husband. Find something to appreciate him for and communicate that to him (after all, no you are the one who decided to marry the big lug). Is he a good provider? Is he a hard worker? Is he kind to his parents? Is he the good father?

To not respect your husband is to shame him.

**ESV Proverbs 12:4** An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.

The behavior of wives has a big impact on husbands. A wife should not disrespect her husband by talking bad about him to other women. She should not share his weakness, blunders, sins, failings or poor decisions. We all have our problems. Everyone is a sinner.

ESV **Proverbs 31:10-11** An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

**So What?**

**15. What is the wife's role in a marriage and what is the standard for that role?**

**16. What is the rationale for holding the husband in such high esteem?**

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

**Teacher's note:** These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Coving each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

Stephen E. Atkerson  
[www.NTRF.org](http://www.NTRF.org)  
09/22/13

\*\*\*\*\*