

A Spirit-Filled Wife

Ephesians 5:22-24

- 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**
- 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.**
- 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.**

If we were asked to describe the ideal marriage, I wonder what we would write. You could fill a library with the books men have written analyzing what makes the ideal marriage. Millions of dollars are generated every year by books, publications, conferences and seminars designed to help couples have stronger relationships.

It's interesting to note that God's description of the ideal marriage didn't take very long, just a paragraph. Yet with these few brushes from Paul's inspired pen, we have the greatest teaching for marriage the world has ever known. It has endured the test of centuries. Those who have learned its secrets have gone on to enjoy its fruits and passed it on to succeeding generations. Those who have ignored its counsel have faced hurt, bitterness, anger and resentment. They've also passed these painful wounds on to their children.

These are universal principles that will work if you been married for five months or fifty years. The truths apply to all couples at all times. The more we apply them, the greater and more fulfilling our marriages become. The more that we ignore them the worse our marriages deteriorate.

I assure you that in preparing this message, I have spent hours trying to understand the meaning and application of these verses to our marriages in this day and age. I have tried as much as is possible to divorce myself from the prevailing currents of our culture and to get at both *what* the Scripture is saying here and *why* it says it. God's counsel here is stated very simply. What it says is fairly straightforward:

As the church is subject to Christ, so wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything.

That is almost verbatim from verse 24. Wives are to "**submit**" to their husbands. But because it goes so strongly against our cultural mindset, and because this verse has been abused in the past, let me offer a few comments that may help us approach it:

First, the context here is the joy and thankfulness of being filled with the Spirit (5:18-20). Remember we said that to be "**filled with the Spirit**" is to surrender to God and allow the Holy Spirit to control your thoughts, words and actions. Wives can't "**submit**" apart from the Spirit. A wife's submission to her husband is not a cross that she glumly must bear. It is rather the path of joy. Just as submission to God is the way to true and lasting joy, so a wife's submission to her husband as to the Lord is the way to true and lasting joy.

Second, this passage compares the marriage relationship with the relationship of Christ and His church. Last time we learned some amazing truths about Christ and the church. We need to understand that Christian marriage is to be a

powerful witness to a selfish world where everyone is fighting for his or her rights. The world should look at Christian marriages and instantly see the difference. They should see a Christian husband tenderly and selflessly loving his wife as Christ loved the church. The world should see a Christian wife joyfully submitting to and respecting her husband. The world should see Christian children obeying their parents and the parents lovingly and patiently training their children in the ways of the Lord. The difference between this picture and the garbage on TV should cause the world to marvel.

Third, *all* Christians are under authority. Husbands are not an authority unto themselves. They must submit to Christ. And even Christ, the Son of God submits Himself to His Father. 1 Cor.11:3 says, "**But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.**" In the Trinity, all three Persons are equally God and yet to carry out the divine plan, the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. There is perfect love and harmony among the members of the Trinity. There is no rivalry or competition. Even so in marriage, the husband and wife are equal as persons before God, sharing in the grace of salvation (Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7). But there is an order of authority and sub-mission to reflect the divine image.

Fourth, understand that the church is in no way degraded by submitting to Jesus Christ. To the contrary, it is to the church's glory to submit to Christ. Even so, it is not degrading for a wife to submit to her husband. Rather, like the church, it results in "**her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless**" (5:27 NASB). Submission results in her ultimate good.

As we examine the Spirit-filled marriage, today we'll examine the nature of the Spirit-filled wife and then next time the nature of the Spirit-filled husband.

A. The MEANING of Submission (v. 22).

Here it is ladies, the dreaded "S" word. Just saying the word "**submit**" in the context of marriage is about as welcome in some women's ears as nails scratching across a blackboard. "**Submit**" comes from a Greek word that means "to get in order under." It means, "to yield to authority." When you drive within the speed limit, you submit to the law. The middle voice grammatical structure suggests this is *willing* and voluntary.

Paul states (5:22), "**Wives, *submit* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**" The verb "*submit*" is in italics because it is not in the Greek text, but is carried over from verse 21. As we saw, being subject to one another in the fear of Christ is a result of being filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

"**As to the Lord**" does not mean that a wife must submit to her husband in exactly the same way that she submits to the Lord. The Lord is perfect and every husband is far from perfect (all the wives say, Amen!). Rather, Paul means that submission to your husband is a part of obedience to the Lord. If you are fighting against the idea of being subject to your husband, your attitude reflects that you are really fighting against the Lord, who ordained this order in marriage. So you must begin by yielding to the Lord and His inspired Word.

Women being "**subject**" to their husbands is not popular. The SBC adopted a resolution on the family that included the headship of husbands and the

submission of wives. Modernists and liberals went nuts! They said this concept was archaic and demeaning to women.

The reason so many people have such a problem with submission in marriage is that they have a misconception of the concept. Some men have used this to dominate their wives. The common view of submission is the husband spread out in a recliner as "master of his domain" while his wife serves as a submissive slave, doing all the work. I have two daughters and I would have great trouble with any young man with this view!

A comic strip showed a newlywed couple driving up to a hotel on their honeymoon. The bride said, **"Let's not act like newlyweds, let's act like we've been married for a long time."** The husband said, **"Okay, you carry the luggage."**

Nothing could be further from biblical truth. Look at the preceding verse. All believers are to be **"submitting to one another."** We are to willingly give up our rights, our possessions, our time, our energy to help, love and encourage each other. In that sense, husbands also **"submit"** to wives.

Submission does not imply the inferiority of the wife to her husband. This would be heretical, because it would imply the inferiority of the Son to the Father because the Son submits to the Father (even in eternity, 1 Cor. 15:28). A godly husband is to be a good manager of his household (1 Tim. 3:4, 12). A good manager utilizes and praises the strengths of those he manages. If a wife is better at something than the husband is, a smart husband will recognize that gift and let her use it for their common good.

Submission does not imply passivity. A submissive wife may actively try to influence her husband for God (as 1 Peter 3:1-6 implies). The wife whose husband is disobedient to the Lord is not told to be passive and not influence him. Rather, she is told *how* to influence him by her quiet and gentle spirit. Submission means that after a thorough, honest sharing of opinions and feelings, if there is still disagreement, the wife must go along with the husband's decision, as long as it is not sinful. But, I must add, *he will answer to God* for that decision, and so he should only override his wife's objections after much prayer and with fear and trembling! In our almost 28 years of marriage, I could not come up with a single example of where I have had to overrule Kathy. We've always come to mutual agreement as we've talked and prayed through decisions.

What biblical submission does mean. It means God has an order in the family. Students are under the authority of the teacher. So it is with parents and children, employees and employers, coaches and teams. The husband has one role, the wife another.

What does it mean to submit? Here is a good definition: *Biblical submission is the attitude and action of willingly and wholeheartedly respecting, yielding to, and obeying the authority of another.*

That definition applies to all of the spheres of authority: to God Himself; human government; church government; wives to husbands; children to parents; and workers to employers. It includes our attitude, because it is not to be forced, but willing and wholehearted.

How does this work?

B. The METHOD for Submission (v. 23).

Verse 23 explains verse 22. **“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”** It is significant that Paul does *not* say that the husband *ought to be* the head of his wife, but rather, “the husband *is* the head of his wife.” It’s a stated fact, not a command. Some husbands are weak, ineffective, and just plain lousy heads of their wives, but they are still in that position of authority.

What does it mean that the husband is the head of the wife? First, it means that there are gender-based roles in marriage as ordained by God. Note that she is to “**submit**” to her “**OWN husband**.” Women are not inferior to men. She doesn’t “**submit**” to every man, just her husband.

Second, all of the New Testament commands for wives to submit to their husbands are addressed to the wives, not to the husbands. The Bible never commands the husband to put his wife in subjection. It does not command the husband to be the head of his wife, as we’ve seen. Rather, it is a fact and the wife is to respond to the Lord, who designed marriage in this way, by willingly submitting to her husband.

C. The MODEL for Submission (v. 24).

Paul says “**just as**” or “in the same way as” “**the church is subject Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands.**” This begs the question, “How is the church subject to Christ?”

The church’s relationship to Christ is not dehumanizing or demeaning. Our relationship to Jesus is not subservient slavery but grateful recipients of His love and care. John Stott said, “**Whenever the husband’s headship mirrors the headship of Christ, then the wife’s submission to the protection and provision of his love, far from detracting from her womanhood, will positively enrich it.**”

1. Submission involves respecting your husband.

When Paul sums up his counsel (5:33), he repeats that the husband is to love his wife (from verse 25). But rather than saying that the wife must *submit* to her husband, he says that she must *respect* him. I conclude that a large part of submission involves respect.

2. Submission to your husband is total.

Since genuine submission to Christ must be total, genuine submission to your husband must be total. Notice that last phrase. It says “**in everything**.”

What does Paul mean by “**in everything**?”

- (1) “In everything” means that you cannot create loopholes to dodge the commandment.

Paul knew that we’re all prone to try to dodge the difficult commands of the Bible. Many wives will say, “I would submit to my husband if he would just love me as you’ve described. But how can I submit when he is so selfish and insensitive?” In marriage counseling, this is always the biggest hurdle that I have to try to get couples over. When they stop focusing on the faults of their mate and start focusing on their own responsibilities, it’s a breakthrough.

(2) "In everything" does not include anything inconsistent with biblical truth.

If your husband asks you to do something that Scripture forbids, you must respectfully decline. If he asks you to view pornography, you must say no. If he asks you to lie for him or cheat on your taxes or stop going to church, you would sin against God to go along with your husband's request. There is a respectful way to resist such ungodly demands, but you must resist.

(3) "In everything" does not mean enabling laziness and irresponsibility.

If your husband is dumping his responsibilities on you or using you as his slave to cater to his laziness, you need to talk to him. He needs to be confronted with his faults in a gracious, but firm manner. To allow him to go on in his sin is not to love him as Christ commands you to do.

(4) "In everything" does not mean submitting to criminal behavior, including physical abuse.

If a husband is doing drugs in the home or is abusing the children or his wife, he is violating both God's law and the laws of the state. Submission does not mean passively tolerating such sin. A wife should call the police and the husband should go to jail.

D. Applying the Principle of Submission.

1. The greatest enemy in submission is self.

When we fail to submit to the Lord or anyone who has authority over us it is because of selfishness. We argue, fight and hold grudges because we want what we want and will not submit to authority.

2. The greatest aid in submission is the Holy Spirit.

Remember v. 18, we are commanded to be **"filled with the Spirit."** Ladies you will never truly submit to your husbands in your own power. The flesh is strong. The Spirit of God must control you.

3. The greatest joy in submission is surrender to God.

Ladies, submission is not so much about trusting your husband. It is about trusting what God can do with your husband.

Linda Dillow shares a story about a woman that she knew. **"Sharon was a beautiful, intelligent woman and a new Christian when her husband left her..."** He moved away to pursue pleasure at any cost. **"Many people called her a fool when she continued to hope for reconciliation and kept the doors open for hope. She waited for him and strove to be submissive."** She memorized this quote from Alan Redpath, **"There is nothing – no circumstance, no trouble, no testing – that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to Him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret – for I will rest in the joy of what my Lord is – that is the rest of victory."** Many were also shocked when her husband returned, deeply committed to Christ and his wife.

CONCLUSION: Ladies, the greatest way to enhance your marriage is to show **"respect"** for your husband. A woman went to see a counselor and confided that she hated her husband, and intended to divorce him. **"I want to hurt him all I can."** **"Well, in that case,"** said the counselor, **"I advise you to start showering him with compliments. When you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him devotedly, then start the divorce action. That is the way to hurt him."** Some months later the wife returned to report that all was going well. She had followed his counsel. **"Good,"** he said, **"Now's the time to file for divorce."** **"Divorce!"** the woman said indignantly. **"Never. I love my husband dearly."** (*Bits & Pieces*, 8-91).

I realize that this is not an easy subject to apply and obey, but I would encourage each of you to grapple with it especially in areas where you may be resisting the Lord. If you're having trouble in your marriage, don't blame your husband or wait for him to start loving you as he should. Instead, do something radical: Submit to your husband in every area, even as the church is to submit to Christ. If you're fighting this portion of Scripture, you're not submitting. And if you're not submitting, the world won't see Christ in your marriage.