

## The Church, God's Plan for This Age: Understanding Biblical Submission and Headship in Marriage

Ephesians 5:22-24

January 3, 2021

### Cultural Background:

- 1) The traditional roles of heavy-handed husbands and unquestioning obedient wives was being challenged by the rise of the New Roman Woman who defied their husbands and traditional roles.
- 2) Roman women were rising to places of leadership in the civic and religious life of their communities.
- 3) There was a gender identity going on in society.
- 4) Paul wrote to provide a Biblical and Christological perspective on what it means to live as husband and wife.
- 5) Paul's directions to husbands and wives are counter to every cultural pattern represented in Roman society.

### Message:

1. The wife's obligation to follow the leadership of her husband and her pattern (22)
  - a. Wives are to follow the leadership of their husbands in their marriage (cf. 18-21).
    - i. Submission is a means to the filling of the Holy Spirit.
    - ii. Improperly ordered family relationships hinder the work of the Spirit in the home and church.
    - iii. The basic idea is that women should not seek to assert themselves in the home in a way that could be viewed as ruling, controlling, or dominating.
    - iv. Instead, they must acknowledge the God-given role assigned to the husband and respect the leadership he endeavors to provide for the family.
  - b. Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord.
    - i. Wives are to consider how they respond to the leadership that Christ provides to the church.
    - ii. The wife's response is not based on the perfect obedience of her husband to Christ.
    - iii. The wife's response is not conditioned on whether or not her husband is a believer.
    - iv. Christian wives must not follow their husbands into sin or subject themselves to horrible abuse – "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).
2. The husband's leadership role and his pattern (23)
  - a. The reason that wives are to submit to their husbands is the fact that the husband-wife relationship is modeled on the relationship of Christ to the church.
  - b. The pattern for role relationships in marriage is rooted firmly in the new covenant.
  - c. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.
    - i. Christ provides the church with guidance, direction, inspiration, strength, help, sustenance, and leadership.
    - ii. Though Christ is the Savior of the body, the husband is not the Savior of the wife. Instead, the husband is to lead and serve his wife as Christ, the Savior, gave Himself for the church.
3. Reiteration of the wife's obligation to submit (24)
  - a. The wife is to submit herself to her husband in a similar way as the church submits to Christ.
  - b. "In everything" indicates that this should be the normal disposition of the wife toward her husband.
  - c. The wife should cultivate an attitude of affirming, supporting, and respecting her husband's leadership in the marriage without holding back certain areas where she wants to assert or maintain control.
  - d. The wife demonstrates submission through **reverencing** (respecting) her husband (cf. 33).
    - i. Respect is the man's basic need – feeling disrespected is as painful to a man as it is for a woman to feel unloved.
    - ii. Men often hear criticism as contempt; women often feel silence as hostility.
    - iii. Unconditional respect is just as important as unconditional love.
    - iv. Respect is one of the tools Christian wives possess to win an unbelieving husband (1 Peter 3:1-2).
    - v. Respect is the key to ministering to the husband.
    - vi. Respect is one of the wife's most powerful tools for negotiating conflict with her husband.
  - e. The fact that wives are to have a submissive disposition to their husbands in everything does not mean that wives are not to set Biblical boundaries.

- i. Submission is always a free choice.
- ii. Submission is not bondage.
- iii. Since the husband's relationship with his wife is similar to Christ's relationship to the church, she has free choice and is not a slave.
- iv. Many marital problems arise when a husband tries to keep his wife "under the law," and she feels all the emotions the law will bring: wrath, guilt, insecurity, and alienation (Rom. 4:15; James 2:10; Gal. 5:4).
- v. The idea of slave-like submission is not consistent with Ephesians 5; Christ never takes away our will or asks us to do something hurtful.
- vi. When a wife sets clear boundaries, a controlling husband can begin to grow.

Conclusion:

1. Wives, Spirit-Filled, Word-guided, respect is one of your most powerful tools for ministering to your husband and to Christ Himself. Do your attitudes, words, and actions show respect to your husband?
2. Husbands, Spirit-Filled, Word-guided, loving leadership is one of your most powerful tools for ministering to your wife, the Lord, and the body of Christ.