

Husbands And Wives

Wives Under Submission

Ephesians 5:22-24

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24 (ESV))

All through these scriptures, we see clearly that God gives commands to His children! Often, His commands are strong and straightforward. But just as often, His commands may seem more like “guidelines” and even “suggestions”, often given in kindness and gentleness. But regardless of the manner in which His commands are given, underlying each of them is a “sure and certain unction” that tells us that we must obey His words.

Thankfully, also underlying all of His commands is the “one all-important command” that sets all other commands into their proper context. And that is the “command of love”, that we are to “love the Lord our God with all that we have within us, and that we are to love all the other people within our lives even as Christ loves them”. And with that “command of love” to undergird us, then all God’s other commands become much easier to follow.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:2-3 (ESV))

The commands given to us here in Ephesians 5 are gently given and are not burdensome, but are still yet commands. And so were the words that we studied last week in verse 21 . . .

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And in Philippians 2 . . .

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

Those are all “gently-given commands”! And so are those that will follow in verse 25 regarding how a man is to love His wife, all gently-given commands, but still commands.

Why and under what circumstances does God find it necessary to give commands to us? The answer to that question will become a very important one as we continue on with our study of this blessed relationship that God has given to husbands and wives. And we will certainly need to know that answer.

So then, why and under what circumstances will God deem it necessary to give commands to you and me? He will give commands to us when the thing that He is commanding us to do does not come as a natural response within our given nature! In other words, as in this case with submission, and as we will also find regarding the man's ability to love, neither comes as a natural part of our character.

May I say that again? Having a submissive response toward one another is not natural to the character within any person. Yes, some people are, by nature, more passive and easygoing than others, but beneath the surface of every personality is an independent nature that at some level will always revert to the demands of their pride, "my claim to my right to myself". And while you may not often see that response as it is taking place, it is still none the less there, lurking beneath the surface.

Here in these words, as we said in the message last week, God has begun this admonition towards humility and submission by addressing both the husband and the wife, and indeed all people. But in our text for today, God focuses in on the necessity for humility and submission from the wives. Here He says to the wives,

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24 (ESV))

Again, you will recall in the message last week that God first set the stage for obedience to this command by commanding that all people be humble and submissive in their relationships with one another. Those words again . . .

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

And in Philippians 2 . . .

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV))

In these words, we see that it is incumbent upon each member of a relationship to be humble and submissive toward the others, not only for the good of their own soul, but also to make the humility and submission of others easier to be done.

And that is especially so on the part of the husband. If and to the degree that a husband obeys these commands regarding humility and submission, then the command given specifically to the wife to be humble and respectful and submissive will become easier for her to follow.

May I say that a bit stronger? Husbands, we must be warned that if we are not faithful to fulfill our part in these commands, then it will make our wife's response of submission burdensome and ever so difficult.

What then do these words require of a wife? May we read them again?

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24 (ESV))

In verse 21, where each of us, including the wife was instructed to be submissive to everyone . . .

21 . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

It must be understood that the circumstances and the level of submissiveness should always be defined by the situation and by the individual persons involved. Here, God addresses the very intimate relationship between a husband and wife, and He is being very specific in His commands to her, saying to her . . .

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

Take note here that God is being very clear and specific in this command, using a double possessive wording "your own husband" when describing who a wife is to be submissive towards. Folks, God does not waste these precious words of scripture. These words are all very, very intentional. In the intimate relationships that are commonly enjoyed by a husband and wife, the wife is to submit only to her own husband and to no other . . . not to some other person's husband, not to her boyfriend, not to anyone else. Again, note the words carefully. They are simple and they are specific . . .

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

And the submission is to be "as to the Lord". What does that mean, "as to the Lord"? The command harkens back to the "first and greatest command" that is required of her, to "love the Lord her God with all of her heart, soul, mind and strength". Along with her love, her "submission" to the Lord must be with the same fervor.

And here, according to these words, so also, the submission that the wife has towards her husband must be in like manner to the submission she has towards Christ. And here in verse 23 we read why her submission is so necessary. It is because God has given her husband a special position of authority and responsibility within the relationship. Listen!

23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. (Ephesians 5:23)

These are very serious words and must be taken as such. Here, God declares the husband to be the “head”, the “leader”, the “decision maker” within the relationship. But the analogy must not be taken too far, in that men have often used these opportunities to “lord over” their wives. And that must not be! And the analogy also must not be taken too far such as in these words that declare Christ to be Savior of the church. The husband can never be the “Savior” of his wife, because there is but one Savior of souls and that is Christ Himself. But the importance of the wife accepting and embracing the role of her husband being the “head”, the “spiritual leader” of their relationship is still emphatic.

Now, no doubt, many wives who read or hear these words struggle to rationalize them in the context of their own relationship with their husbands, their first response being, “that can’t be what the Lord means”.

Oh but it is! Sarah, Abraham’s wife, actually called him “lord”. Listen to the context of her words given through the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3 . . .

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some (husbands) do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. (1 Peter 3:1-6 (ESV))

When we read the story of Sarah’s life and about her struggles with being able to conceive a child, we can see that some of her responses to the difficulties of life were not always Godly. She did not always trust God as she should have. And in asking Abraham to father a child through another woman, she surely violated God’s moral laws. But though she failed in some matters, her overall life was still counted as being

Godly and one to be emulated, especially in this matter of respect for her husband, as she called him “lord”.

As for us in this generation, are the “thoroughly modern” women of today’s culture expected to do as Sarah did as she respected her husband as her “lord”? May I suggest that it would be an admirable pursuit!

Unfortunately, the most prominent roadblock to a wife’s respect and submission towards her husband will come from the husband himself. A wife knows her husband better than any other person knows him. She not only sees and hears his behavior, her keen intuitive senses can also know things about her husband that even he does not perceive about himself. I know that is so with me and my wife. And so, when those things that our wives see and hear and sense in us men are not trustworthy and worthy of respect, even defiling, then her task of respecting and honoring and obeying can become an insurmountable obstacle.

But note the encouragement that is given through the words of the Apostle Peter . . .

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

These words are a tall order for most wives, especially when her husband’s failures are many and often. But still, this is the standard that God sets.

May I say again, the key to a wife being able to remain respectful and submissive to her husband is that she must always do everything “as unto the Lord”! Her faithfulness must ever and always be “to the Lord”, irrespective of her husband’s behavior.

And may I admonish the wives to not just “grit your teeth and bare it”. God does not desire for our “teeth to be set on edge”. Anger and bitterness can quickly develop, destroying whatever love you once enjoyed.

No, as a wife loves and respects and honors her husband “as unto the Lord”, she must do it from the strength of the “indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.” It is that power and that power alone that will befit her to meet her duty with the joy that God intends.

Two final thoughts before we close . . . note the words in verse 24!

24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:24 (ESV))

Here, God emphasizes that the wife must submit to her husband in everything. But the understanding and the application of these words must be guarded carefully. In this crooked and depraved generation in which we live, many a husband has, no doubt, twisted and misused these words, asking their wives to participate in behaviors that are sinful.

May I say emphatically that if a husband asks his wife to sin, she should certainly not obey him? Certainly not! God will never command anyone to participate in sin, whether through a direct command from Himself to us, or secondarily through a husband asking his wife to sin.

Note carefully the analogy that God is giving. It is as the church submits to Christ that wives should submit to their husbands. Christ would never ask His “bride”, the church, to participate in sin, so neither should a husband ask his wife to sin. So no, don’t be confused. Wives keep all of your behavior pure, and especially so as it regards the marriage bed.

And in that regard, may we examine one last instruction regarding the humble submission of the wife.

In today’s culture, the withholding of one’s self from their husband or their wife, perhaps as a punishment, or as a bargaining chip, or simply out of anger, seems common.

Listen carefully to God’s instruction regarding such behavior given in 1 Corinthians 7.

2 . . . because of 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 also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:2-5 (NASB))

Folks, may I say simply that God really is God over all that we think and say and do. And He is involved in every intimate detail of life. And you and I need to honor and respect and obey all that He has to say about each of the matters of life.

So then, may we close with these words . . .

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24 (ESV))