

Ephesians 5:22-24

Wives, Submit

Main idea: Wives are called to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ.

I started planning this sermon a few weeks ago, not realizing that I would be preaching it on our anniversary.

- Once I realized it, I did what any wise husband should do: I asked my wife.
- And here's what she said. She said, "That's funny." But then she said, "I'm not worried. I trust you."
- Now, even at this point, I thought, "I need to be careful."
- But I also know my wife, and she would always be honest with me about these things.

Wives are called to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ: fully loved, and fully empowered.¹

Read Ephesians 5:22-24

It's interesting that people often see the Bible as old-fashioned on this issue.

- But the Bible's teaching actually elevated women!²
- In those days husbands were seen as the authoritative leaders of the home.³
 - But Christianity dignifies women by clarifying that wives are not slaves.⁴
 - And even more than that, men and women are partners in life and ministry. [Genesis 2:18]
 - [Romans 16:3-4]
 - Because all of us, not just women, are to be devoted primarily to Jesus.⁵

So submitting to your husband involves recognizing that each of us have certain roles and responsibilities.⁶

- This passage is not reducing a woman's value.
- It's showing how Christian relationships are meant to reflect Christ's love and the Church's trust.⁷
- It invites all of us to understand our closest relationships in light of the gospel: not based on domination or obligation, but on love and grace.⁸
- In fact, in any relationship where we seek to reflect Jesus, we're called to love and act out of humility.⁹

In one sense, we're all called to submit to one another. (v. 21)

- So wives aren't called to be subservient to their husbands. They're not the only ones called to submit.
- And yet, there does appear to be a special way that wives are to submit.¹⁰

The context very clearly tells us how wives are to submit, and to whom. (v. 22)

- They are to submit to their own husband (not to men in general).
- In the animal world, many animals have what's called pair bonding.¹¹ [photo]
 - They live in community with others, and yet are devoted primarily to their mate.
 - In the same way, God gives a family to love and serve, and we're to be devoted to them.¹²
- It also says that wives are to submit as to the Lord. It's an expression of their faith.
 - To submit does not mean to obey. This was the command to children and slaves, not wives.¹³
 - But submit also does not mean the opposite of submit, like to defy. [word study]
 - We don't want to fall into the error of swinging the pendulum too far the other direction.
 - Certain expressions of the feminist movement today seem to say that women should defy their husbands, live independent of their husbands, and don't need men for anything. [chart]
 - And any rational person would, I hope, see that every woman needs a man to open a jar for her once in a while.

- Healthy relationships thrive not on power struggles, but on mutual support and trust. **[Romans 12:10]**
- Also, submission is not about hierarchy: it's about humility, and seeking the good of the other.¹⁴
 - You see, submission is a gospel response, not a forced role.¹⁵
 - "As to the Lord" means it's an act of worship as you trust in Christ.
 - And this kind of trust in Christ applies to all of us.¹⁶
 - Even though I don't follow basketball at all, I think it's a great example of this. **[video]**
 - You can have an amazing shooter, but you're not going to win a championship unless the whole team knows how to work together.
 - We fulfill our purpose best when we lay aside our desire for our own glory.¹⁷

In the same way, the act of submitting itself is a picture of the gospel. (v. 23)

- Submitting reflects the relationship between Christ and the Church.
- Husbands are called to be like Jesus: sacrificial, loving, servant leaders.¹⁸
- The Church submits to Christ not because of domination, but out of love.
- Likewise, wives submit not because of weakness, but out of trust in God's order.
 - Making up our own order is a recipe for failure. **[photo]**
 - The call here is not for husbands to command and wives to comply; it's for both to reflect the dynamic beauty of Christ and the Church, each playing a part in love.¹⁹
 - We'll talk about it more next week, but husbands also have an impossibly high command to obey: to lay down their lives, just as Christ did for His Church.²⁰
 - And the truth is, all of us are called to reflect Christ in how we relate to one another.²¹

Because, once again, it's all about worshiping Christ. (v. 24)

- Now, we should be clear here: "in everything" does not mean in sin, abuse, or blind obedience.²²
- It means in every area of life, the attitude of respect should be present as you serve Jesus.
 - So we've talked a lot about what submitting isn't, but what is it? (v. 33)
 - In the end, submitting means respecting, and I would say, especially not disresecting.
 - Respect is what most men crave; not control, but to be valued and trusted.
 - When it comes down to it, don't marry someone you don't respect.²³
 - And if you're already married, pray for humility and trust: not trust in your husband's perfection, but trust in God's design.²⁴
 - The perfect example of all this is the woman in Proverbs 31.
 - She supports her husband by working hard.²⁵
 - She values her husband by speaking well of him and building him up.²⁶
 - She submits by willingly aligning her actions with what will bless him and their family.²⁷
 - You see, a wife's submission is not silence or slavery, it's strength under control.²⁸

Ultimately, all of this is not about roles for roles' sake. It's about reflecting Jesus in our relationships.

- It's about both spouses choosing humility, choosing grace, and choosing love, again and again.
- It's about living out a relationship that says: "We belong to Christ. We serve each other. And we walk together in love."
- And when we do that, we show the world what the love of Jesus looks like in real life.

Endnotes

1. 1 Peter 3:1-2
2. Proverbs 31:25-26, Acts 2:17-18, Luke 8:1-3
3. Genesis 3:16
4. There are different commands entirely for slaves. Ephesians 6:5-9
5. Matthew 22:37, Luke 14:26
6. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14
7. John 13:34-35
8. Galatians 5:13, Colossians 3:12-14
9. Philippians 2:3-4
10. Else the command would not have been given specifically to wives (and not to husbands, children, and slaves).
11. Prairie voles, beavers, wolves, and gibbons are all good examples of this.
12. 1 Timothy 5:8
13. Ephesians 6:1-9
14. Matthew 20:26-28
15. Romans 12:1, 1 Peter 5:5
16. Ephesians 2:8-10
17. Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 10:31
18. John 13:14-15, Mark 10:45
19. Song of Solomon 2:16
20. Ephesians 5:25-33
21. 1 John 4:7
22. Acts 5:29
23. Proverbs 12:4
24. Proverbs 3:5-6, Philippians 4:6-7
25. Proverbs 31:27
26. Proverbs 31:23
27. Proverbs 31:10-12
28. Titus 2:5, 1 Peter 3:3-4