



Living in Mutual Submission

Part I - Wives to Husbands

Ephesians 5:21-27

(based on a message by Dr. Eugene Boe)

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

“Submit.” Just hearing that word is about as welcome to some women’s ears as fingernails scratching across a blackboard. It cuts through you like a knife and sends a shiver up your spine.

Before we begin to look into this idea of submission, as always, to best understand what God is telling us in His Word, we need to back up a step and read our text in its larger biblical context.

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God ... 15 Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, 22 wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Who is Paul addressing in this letter? He is addressing the church – Christians - followers of Jesus, those

filled with the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Last week we saw that to be “filled with the Spirit” is to be filled with the Word of God. As Jesus said in John 6:63

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”

And as we are filled with the Word, with the Spirit of God, our hearts and minds become more and more transformed by the person and character of Jesus. And we begin speaking the words of God, singing and making music in our hearts to Him, giving thanks, serving others as Christ has served us.

Paul then addresses how that Spirit-filled life lives itself out in various relationships: between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. In our text today, we read how such a Spirit-filled life is lived out specifically in the realm of the marriage relationship.

Here, we learn the most amazing thing about a marriage relationship - something you’ll never learn in any secular book or seminar on marriage.

The marriage relationship is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church.

Husbands and wives are to relate to one another as Christ (the husband) relates to His bride (the church). Today, we will turn our attention to the Christian wife, and next week we will focus on the Christian husband. How are they to relate to one another?

Think of all the things that take place in a household – work, school activities, schedules, inside chores, outside chores.... Who will do what? Who should do what?

When a couple falls in love and marries, they usually don’t consider how their roles as husband and wife will be realized. After all, they’re in love. And when you’re in love everything will simply work itself out. (If you’re married, you know that’s not the case!)

The conflict and confusion between spousal roles is a real problem in many marriages today. Of all the advice offered by secular counselors, newspaper columnists, and talk-show hosts, none comes close to the marriage guidance that God provides in His Word. After all, who better to define the roles of husband and wife than the One who created them originally?

What role does a wife play in the marriage relationship, and how should she relate to her husband? What does God tell us in His Word?

**Accept in attitude and action
that your purpose as a wife
is to complete your husband.**

The husband needs his wife to complete him; for as you know, men are not perfect. From where does this idea of completion come? From the beginning. **Genesis 2:18** The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (The gift of celibacy is the exception.)

From this verse we know that God created the woman; and this woman becomes a wife - to be her husband's helper. And she is the kind of helper who is suitable, who corresponds to his needs and his situation.

When looking for a wife, a man should consider the one who will complete him in order for him to be the kind of person God wants him to be. A question to consider in premarital counseling is ...

“How do you believe this woman will help you become the person God wants you to be?”

When we “fall in love” most of us don't ever consider that one of the reasons we are to be joined to a person is to accomplish God's purpose.

Likewise, before marrying, a woman should consider the question ...

“Why do you believe that this man is the man God wants you to complete? What can you contribute to his life to help him become the person God wants him to be?”

What do you do if you're already married and you wonder, “Am I suitable for this person I'm married to?” You have to do something even more difficult. You have to say ...

*“God make me the kind of helper
who will help my husband be
the person You want him to be.”*

We as husbands are successful partly because of the woman with whom God has provided us. “Behind every successful man there is a good woman.” There's a lot of truth to such a statement.

In Genesis 2:18 God established the role of the wife as a helper suitable to her husband so that she might complete him in becoming all that God wants him to be.

Martin Luther goes so far as to say, “If a woman is not ready to make her primary purpose in life her husband's helper so that he becomes all that God wants him to become, she should not marry.”

As a wife, how can this be worked out practically in life? Make the home a safe place – a place your husband wants to be – so that he might say, “There's no place like home! It's a joy to come home!”

Maintain a good attitude at home. Discuss things in the right kind of way - a loving way, an open way, an honest way. Show interest in his problems and concerns. Keep yourself healthy – physically, and most importantly, spiritually.

Of course, many of these things don't apply only to the woman. What Paul says regarding the wives must be read in conjunction with what he says regarding the husbands. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* But that does not leave wives off the hook. They are to deliberately contribute to the completion and growth of their husbands.

How should a wife relate to her husband? First, accept in attitude and action that your purpose as a wife is to complete your husband. Second ...

**Accept in attitude and action
that your position as a wife
is to be subordinate to your husband.**

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

“Submit.” The word used here is made up of two words. The one word means “under” - the other, “to appoint or to place into a certain position or station”. So “submit” is defined as ...

**“to voluntarily put yourself,
in attitude and action,
under the one placed over you”**

In other words, the wife says, “I choose to subject myself to you.”

You might ask, “Now when did my husband get placed over me?” When you got married. The moment you said, “I do” you were placed under him. That’s what marriage involves. Positionally, that’s your order in the marriage relationship.

Practically, it can be difficult to know what that means. If she’s enjoyed a great deal of freedom as a single woman, suddenly being placed under the authority of her husband can be very difficult.

It doesn’t have anything to do with respecting him. It doesn’t have anything to do with how important he is. It has to do with what marriage is before God. At the moment of marriage, God establishes the husband as the head of the home.

Positionally, that’s his position. He may violate it. He may ignore it. He might completely foul the whole thing up. But that’s his position before God, and he’s responsible to answer for that. And the wife is placed under his authority.

What are some misconceptions concerning submission? It is not merely a concept for women. Verse 21 says, “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” All of us are subject to someone. All of us are placed under the authority of someone. And all of us are placed under the authority of God.

Submission is not slavery. One author put it this way, **“It’s not the submission of a slave to a king, but it’s the submission of a queen to a king.”** That’s the relationship. The wife is a queen.

Submission is not that of silence, where she is to be mute and no longer speak to her husband about the needs of her heart. But she is to speak of these things openly and honestly and lovingly – not in a destroying, cutting down way. It does not mean that her abilities are to remain dormant. It does not mean that she is in any way inferior.

**It’s not a matter of inferiority,
but it’s a matter of order that God has designed**

so that both husbands and wives might be happy and experience the kind of lives that God has made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It means that the wife chooses to put all of her talents, abilities, resources, and energy at her husband’s disposal. She yields and uses all of her abilities under the management of her husband for the good of her husband and family.

This is also a spiritual matter. In other words, the wife’s relationship to her husband is directly related to her relationship with the Lord. “Wives be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord.” In other words, she is to have the same kind of submissive relationship to her husband as she does to her Lord.

It’s a battle to be submissive, no matter who we are, no matter who we’re called to be submissive to – because the old Adam rebels against such an idea. Our sinful nature does not want to go that particular way. And so we fight against it in many different ways.

**How can we then live as God,
in His Fatherly love,
calls us to live?**

It’s ONLY as a person is filled with the Spirit of God, through continual absorption in the Word, that he is enabled to subject himself, in a biblical way, to another – remembering the cross, where the Blessed Savior gave His life on his behalf.

Each day is to be a renewal of that vow we took when we pledged ourselves, each to the other “for better, for worse”– that His honor and His glory might be manifested in and through our lives.

It’s a total unity where two have become one flesh through the uniting of them by God. It takes a great deal of striving and struggling and heartache and forgiveness and love for us to work out this together. But oh, the joy of seeing God bring two together as one!

How should you wives relate to your husbands in a biblical way? First, accept in attitude and action that your purpose as a wife is to complete your husband. Second, accept in attitude and action that your position as a wife is to be subordinate to your husband. And third ...

**Accept in attitude and action
that your pattern as a wife
is the relationship of the church to Christ.**

It's as though God is saying, "I know you (both wives and husbands) need an example to follow - because unless I draw a concrete picture for you, you're going to get this thing loused up. And I know even if I draw a concrete picture you're still going to get confused. So here's the way it ought to be.

"Just as Christ is head over the church, so the husband is head over the wife. Just as Christ is head over the church, and therefore the church is to subject itself unto Christ, so you as wives, who have your husband as your head, are to subject yourselves to your own husbands."

We think of all the aspects this entails - how as Head, Christ loves the church, provides for the church, and directs the church. And as the church, we willingly follow our Head and we let our needs be made known to Him.

So a wife lets her needs be known to her husband. And as she entrusts her life to Christ, so she entrusts her life to her husband and trusts that God will direct and guide and lead.

Is it always easy for the church to submit to Christ? No. Does it always seem joyful? Is life a bed of roses when we submit to Him? No. There are thorns. There are trials. There are difficulties.

So in our marriage relationship those things exist also, for we live in a sinful world. But what is the end result of the church submitting herself to Christ? He is honored and glorified and the church is blessed and prospers and experiences the joy and peace that passes understanding.

Far too often, the problems in marriages stem from the husband not functioning with Christ-like headship. Many wives have never experienced Christ-like love from their husbands - and it makes it just that much

more difficult to submit themselves to his headship. Likewise, many husbands have never experienced Christ-like love from their wives.

As a husband or wife, maybe your spouse first needs to experience that Christ-like, sacrificial kind of love from you.

What makes a good marriage? You could fill a library with the books that have been written in order to answer that question. Millions of dollars are generated every year by books, publications, and seminars designed to help couples have stronger relationships.

What's the big secret?

It goes completely against the heart of our culture. In many respects, it's totally un-American (as we Americans love to fight for "our rights"). It goes totally against our nature as humans.

The way to a successful,
God-honoring marriage
is the way of mutual submission
- flowing from the One who submitted Himself
completely for your sake.

As God has spoken to you through His Word, what should you do? Come before Him and examine your attitudes and your actions. And as He reveals to you those places where you are having difficulties - confess these sins to Him and accept His forgiveness.

God doesn't leave you in despair.
He leads you into the forgiveness and the joy
and the love that is yours in Christ.

And then, ask the Holy Spirit to so bring you into the Word - that He will change and transform your life so that you will have the kind of relationship with your mate that would bring honor and glory to Him and would be a blessing to both of you. For in Christ, your marriage can be something far more than you've ever dared to imagine!