

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do 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^[a] 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. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”^[b] ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

6 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”^[c]*

⁴ *Fathers,^[d] do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 5:21-6:4 NIV 2011)*

Submit to One Another

When he saw her it was like waking up from a dream. She was the most beautiful thing he had seen. He hadn't really realized what he was missing until the Lord brought her to him. He wouldn't be alone. Here's his companion. Here's a helper suitable for him. At that moment he made a decision. He would be committed to her, love her, put her before himself. How could he not? When she looked into his eyes there was no where she would rather be. She knew he was the head and she trusted him. She was not inferior or lower than him. How could she be? She heard him sing, “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” They were equal...one flesh. They would work together, side-by-side. She was the suitable helper, his companion. She would love him. She would respect him. In the perfection of the 6th day of creation God made it even better when he brings male and female together in marriage. On the seventh the Lord would look over all he had created, including this married couple, and declare, “It is very good.”

God created it, therefore, he decides the rules. We get that, “My house, my rules.” But with God, his instructions are not to bind or shackle us but to bless male and female and the world we live. That's still how God intends marriage to be. That's what we see from Paul in Ephesians 5:21, “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” Submit. Most people don't want to hear that word. It has this connotation that you are lesser than someone else. It has this idea that you lost in some way. Submitting sounds weak. But

that's not what Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 5. This is voluntary yielding in love. It's saying, "You first." It's not a competition of who wins, who is right, or a fight for who has the power. No, we say, "You first" out reverence for Christ. As we see Christ who is Lord of all, out of fear of Him who was there in the beginning and through him all things are made, we say, "You first," to his will and to each other. As we stand in awe at what Christ has done for us, how he lived and died and his gracious love that is already mine, we see I don't need to worry about trying to get ahead or be right. It's not about me, "You first." As we see Christ who rules all things for our good, we trust we don't have to fight for control. It's not about me, "You first."

So how does that look in daily life? Paul draws our eyes to our closest relationships. First he says (v.22-24), **"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do 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"** The church recognizes who is the head and who is the helper. Christ is in charge of the church. He watches over and protects her. He guides her. He gives direction for the church. The church is not some helpless thing. No, Christ has equipped the church with gifts He chooses to works with and through her. At the same time, the church submits to Christ and His will out of respect for who Christ is.

So wives are to submit to their husbands. They are the helpers not in an inferior way but as the companion. Wives are anything but helpless. As God equipped Eve to be a suitable helper to Adam, so God equips wives today. She supports the decisions that they make together. She willingly puts aside her own misgivings and trusts the guidance and direction from her husband who is the head. She loves without expectations. She gives a positive response while having a good attitude. She neither keeps score in the relationship nor talks down to or negatively about her husband. Unless the husband says something that goes against God's Word there's no convenient picking or choosing when to do this but, **"wives should submit to their husbands in everything."** This is God's will not to shackle, bind, or put down but to bless her and the world we live.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...husbands out to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church" (v.25, 28, 29). This is more than just a romantic gesture or emotional love. This is love that chooses. It's a continual love that does not wait for circumstances to be in your favor or after she does something lovable. It chooses to love as Christ loved the church. It's selfless love. It's sacrificial love that puts someone before yourself. It does not keep record of wrongs. It does not hold past things over her head. It's love that freely forgives.

Being the head of the wife has nothing to do with lording it over her. It's not about putting her in her place but looks to lift her up. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. It's cherishing and nourishing. It desires to do only what is best for her. As

you listen to your body to hear what you need, what needs attention, how best to handle a situation, so husbands are to listen to our wives. Pay attention to her. This isn't, "Happy wife, happy life." She is your companion, your partner, your suitable helper. Make the decisions with her by your side as you stand up and lead as the head. When you carry out your role as husband and head it frees your spouse to fulfill her role as helper.

And if God so chooses to bless you with children, Paul speaks to fathers: **"Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."** (6:4). As they are head of the house, so dad, you are the head of raising children in the Lord. Not the church. Not your wife. Fathers. Wives, church, and pastor are there to support and assist, but fathers, you are the head. It's not about teaching them they better listen to you or else, but to fear the Lord and honor him. What good is discipline if it is not followed up with the instruction of the Lord? It only leads to frustration and exasperation of the child. The focus is not about teaching them to be hard workers, good citizens, and decent people. Don't worry, that's a result of raising them in the training and instruction of the Lord.

So what about you who do not have a husband or wife or children? First off, we are all children ourselves. To each of us Paul says, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."** ²**"Honor your father and mother"**—which is the first commandment with a promise—³**"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"** (6:4). Listen, pay attention, and do what mom and dad say. Honor them as you honor your Father in heaven. They are God's representatives that he has placed over you. How this honor and respect will look as you grow older. And still this command remains.

On top of that, you who are single, it still is not good for us to be alone. What God gives us here in Ephesians 5 is what you are to look for in your spouse. Look for someone who will love you and respect you as God's Word directs. All of us, whatever place you are in life, fulfill these words by the way you talk about and look at marriage. You follow this by keeping the marriage bed pure and waiting for marriage to enjoy God's gift of that one-flesh bond of sex. You follow this by waiting to move in together until you are married. You follow this by how you encourage your married friends and how you speak about their spouses. This isn't just a suggestion from God; this is how we are called to live as people who have been set apart as his own. God gives these instructions to protect his gift of marriage, to bless you as male and female, and for the good of this world.

No wonder our world is such a mess. Marriage is not honored by all. Sex is an easy joke, simply a thing to do, and sold for a multi-billion dollar industry with pornography. Children do not obey their parents while being raised more in the training and instruction of this world with maybe some time for the Lord if other things aren't going on in life. Husbands do not love their wives as Jesus loves us and fail to lead as Christ leads us. Focus is on what's in it for me and getting your own way. Wives do not submit

to husbands as we are to submit to Christ. It's seen as a burden, too much, misogynistic and woman-hating. Instead of being committed to each other as long as they both shall live, too many see divorce as a viable option just in case. Unhealthy marriages, marriages are ruined and destroyed because we do not live as God calls us to live. Like Adam, we point the finger at the very gift that God has given blaming him, "It was the woman you put me with...it was the man you put me with...If she would just submit more...if he would just love better ...if he would just pay attention...if she wasn't so busy with everything...she's changed too much...he hasn't changed enough...it was the place you put me in..." Like Adam we cover our shame with excuses while trying to avoid and hide from the truth when God calls to us. But God's Word strips away the covers, calls us to stop listening to the lies, and draws us out from hiding so we see the truth: it's not just them. It's me. The truth is we are more awful and flawed than we could ever begin to imagine.

At the same time you are more loved than you could imagine. When we see how we live and act in our relationships and treat those closest to us, that Jesus would love me has to be grace. It cannot be deserved. And still he chose me to be his bride. He chose to love you as his bride. He was not forced into this relationship by his Father. No, he voluntarily submits to his Father's will who gave him up for us all. For the joy of saving you he submits himself under the weight of cross enduring the suffering while scorning its shame. He assures you, "I didn't want to wait for you to love me; I knew you couldn't. I chose you. I gave myself up for you. I didn't hide your shame. I have taken it away so that the Lord remembers your sin no more. I'm not here to point out your flaws. I washed them with the washing with water and word in baptism. Every stain of sin, every revolting wrinkle, and every other blemish has been washed away. You are a new creation. I have set you apart. I don't blame you. How could I? I took the blame from you. I suffered. I died. I rose again so there is no blame that can stick to you. I'm not ashamed of you, I bring you right before my Father in heaven, dressed in my robe of righteousness, as my radiant bride. I'm proud to call you my own. I know how some days you feel alone, people don't get it, and you feel abandoned. Don't worry, I haven't left you. I am with you always. I'm committed to you." That started at your baptism. That's his promise you receive at the Lord's Supper. That's the promise he renews every day.

This is the mystery that has been revealed to you, dear bride of Christ. It's this love of Jesus that motivates us to want to carry out God's will. It's what gives us the strength to put it into practice. It gives us peace that surpasses understanding when we have not lived up to God's standards. Jesus' love for you never will change. That's the love you get to share in a marriage. Your marriage is a picture of Christ's love to you. When you look at your spouse, see them for who they are: a bride of Christ, chosen and loved and forgiven by Him. Daily you get to show that love. Forgive her sins while confessing your own. Love him without expectation and in spite of what is or is not done. And it's that love that works in our hearts to submit to each other. Amen.