

# Why Every Christian Loves Submission

*Especially Believing Wives - Ephesians 5:22a*

*A Sermon by Chris Mueller*

Times sure have changed. Think about the way we travel. Not too long ago, I ran into the ten rules for riding a stagecoach. Here they are . . .

1. Don't lag at the wash basin. Don't grease your hair, because travel is dusty. Don't imagine for a moment that you are going on a picnic. Expect annoyances, discomfort, and some hardships.
2. If ladies are present, gentlemen are urged to forego smoking cigars and pipes, as the odor of same is repugnant to the gentle sex. Chewing tobacco is permitted, but spit with the wind, not against it.
3. Gentlemen must refrain from the use of rough language in the presence of ladies and children.
4. Buffalo robes are provided for your comfort during cold weather. Hogging robes will not be tolerated, and the offender will be made to ride with the driver.
5. Don't snore loudly while sleeping or use your fellow passenger's shoulder for a pillow; he may not understand and friction may result.
6. Firearms may be kept on your person for use in emergencies. Do not fire them for pleasure or shoot at wild animals, as the sound riles the horses.
7. In the event of runaway horse, remain calm. Leaping from the coach in panic will leave you injured, at the mercy of the elements, hostile Indians and hungry coyotes.
8. Forbidden topics of discussion are stagecoach robberies and Indian uprisings.
9. Gents guilty of unchivalrous behavior toward lady passengers will be put off the stage. It's a long walk back. A word to the wise is sufficient.
10. Abstinence from liquor is requested, but if you must drink, share the bottle. To do otherwise would make you appear selfish and un-neighborly.

What seems outdated, old-fashioned, and at points humorous, was important 100 years ago. Which points to an important fact—we must continually distinguish between that which is tradition and that which is truth, that which is cultural and that which is biblical. Today, Christians are being torn apart because preferences are being taught as truth, and truth is being taught as preference.

This danger is seen clearly when you begin to ask people about the role of a wife and mother, especially as it relates to the quality of submission. In many people's minds, submission is an outdated idea, something that belonged in the 50's, or something men used to control women. What comes to mind when you hear the word submission?

Mixed martial arts—submitting by tapping out

Amish women—living like the 1800's

Football players—who submit to a screaming coach

Your pet dog—who doesn't, submits to your leash training

June Cleaver—the ultimate 50's woman

Obi Wan—submits to the good side of the force

What comes to mind when you think of submission? Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 5 and follow along in your outline as we discover why, if the Lord Jesus Christ were here physically, he'd affirm that every true Christian loves submission—especially believing wives.

If you are new with us, FBC has been studying the letter to the Ephesians word-by-word, forever. We are now at Ephesians 5:22, which introduces the topic of marriage. Some have said that marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handspings and eating with chopsticks—it looks easy until you try it. Verse 22 starts this section and describes God's perfect design for the Christian wife in marriage. Look at verse 22, "*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*" What is submission?

### **First Submitting to authority is submitting to God**

God reminds us that it is He alone who has established all authorities. Read Romans 13:1, "*Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*" Our response to every authority established by God is to be the same—submission. (The only exception is when any authority tries to force us to sin.)

Look at the pattern God gives us in I Peter 2 and 3. First Peter 2:13, "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,*" and 2:18, "*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.*" Then 3:1, "*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands.*" (Here are some of the authorities God established.) God says citizen submit to human government, servant be submissive to your employer/master, and wife be submissive to your own husband.

Who set up this chain of command resulting in a happy Christian home where the relationship between husband and wife is truly fulfilling? I didn't, and neither did Paul or Peter—all they did was tell us God's will. I have heard some men say, "My wife is crucifying me," and I tell them, "Hey, you said you wanted to be like Jesus, didn't you?"

God has defined what our responsibilities are to be, and God says, "Wives, submit to your own husband the same way a Christian should submit to government or employers." Do you want to be in God's will? Submit.

### **Second Submission is to follow the lead of another**

Primarily the verb "be subject" is used as a military term *hupothasso*, from *hupo* meaning under, and from *tasso* meaning to arrange. Put together they mean "to rank under"—to arrange under. The picture is one of a soldier who is under the authority of his commander, following his lead.

This teaches us that submission has nothing to do with the evaluation of a person, just their obedience. Submission has to do with authority, not evaluation. A private can be a better person than a general, but does not have the authority of a general. A child may live better than a parent, but does not have the God-given authority of a parent. And a wife may be godlier than her husband, but she does not have the authority God assigned to her husband. Submission is to follow the lead of another. So why should every Christian love submission—especially believing wives?

## **#1 Submission is applied to all of life and eternal life**

Submission is a godly quality, a Christ-like attribute—God has designed almost every aspect of life to involve submission. Even though we live in an independent, demand-your-rights culture, under God’s rulership we are to submit to . . .

Parents	<u>Luke 2:51</u>
Employees	<u>Titus 2:9</u>
Secular authorities	I Timothy 2
Law Enforcement	<u>Romans 13:1</u>
Church Eldership	<u>I Peter 5:5</u>
To God	<u>James 4:7</u>
To Christ	<u>Ephesians 5:24</u>
To the Word of God	<u>Romans 8:7</u>
To each other	<u>Ephesians 5:21</u>

And the New Testament teaches that wives are specifically commanded to submit themselves to their husbands. The freedom that Christ brings to His children is not a freedom from God’s institutions of marriage, the Church, and even of government. A Christian slave in the New Testament was to continue to submit to his master. Christians are expected to still pay taxes to the government, and to submit to their elders in the church and obey the police.

And in Christ, wives are to submit to their husbands. Salvation in Christ does not nullify what God has already declared good, which is submission to government, to the Church and in marriage. And submission is a godly attribute—and the opposite, rebellion, is a satanic attribute that is to be put to death in the life of a true Christian. Spirit-filled men and women are submissive. Are you a submissive person?

When your boss says do it, do you submit or resist? When your parents tell you they want you in at 11 or they want you in bed by 9, do you try to comply or see how far you can stretch the limit? When your spouse asks you to do something, do you resist, ignore, smart back or do it with a heart that delights in pleasing another? When you make a mistake, do you make excuses first, or do you submit by apologizing from the heart? Do you find yourself making fun of police, teachers, elected officials, employers, parents, elders, husbands, or do you honor them as your God-appointed authorities? What area of life is your biggest challenge to be submissive? It is different for each of us—what is it for you? What would your spouse say? What would your friends say?

When you came to Christ, did you come to Him with a submissive, tender, trusting, dependent heart, or an independent, see if I like this attitude? You see, submission not only applies to life but eternal life. Submission is a quality manifested in the heart of those who are genuinely saved. The true Christian wants to be submissive to Christ. Just as a Christian . . .

comes by faith to Christ and continues to walk in faith

comes in repentance to Christ and continues to walk with a repentant heart

comes to Christ confessing their sinfulness and

continues to confess their sin to Christ

A true believer comes to Christ with a willing heart of submission to His Lordship and continues in submission to His Lordship—not perfectly, but willingly.

Look at Matthew 7:20 to 23, “*You will know them by their fruits. 21 Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? 23 And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.*”

Notice, those who submit to God’s will are those who are saved—and those who practice lawlessness, by doing their own will, are not saved. All true believers are given a new heart by God that allows them to come submissively to Christ and continue with a willing heart to submit to God’s Word. Submission is a quality of the genuinely saved—are you genuine? Why else should you love submission?

## **#2 Submission is one of God’s qualities**

One of the great secrets of the Christian life is that the answers to all of life’s questions are found in the character of God. When we understand who He is, then we can better understand who we are, since we are made in His image. One aspect about God that helps us to comprehend God’s design for marriage and family relationships is the trinity. That divine relationship between the three persons of the Godhead gives us the model to follow for husbands and wives and all relationships.

Think about it—the trinity means our God consists of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all one in essence and attributes, yet three distinct persons and work. The Bible is very clear that God is one, yet you also find at the very beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry we witness the three persons of the trinity all manifested at one time in Matthew 3:16 to 17. This event is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

*“After being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him, and behold a voice out of the heavens saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”* Here you see all three persons of the Godhead at one time—one God, yet each distinct in person.

Also the great commission reminds us we fulfill our mission on this planet in the name of the triune God. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The trinity is a mystery that

can't be rationalized, giving evidence of just how great our God is. He is greater than we can imagine. There is only one God we love, yet He is manifested in three persons. And what is amazing is within that unity and equality, there are different functions.

1 John 4:10 says, "*the Father sent the Son*"

John 14:26 says, "*the Father sends the Holy Spirit*"

John 15:26 says, "*the Son and the Father send the Spirit*"

So in the trinity there is a perfect unity, a perfect oneness, yet there is authority and submission. All three persons of the trinity are equal, all three are God, they share the same essence, and yet there is submission and authority. The Spirit submits to the Son and Father and the Son submits to the Father. There is no inferiority, no dominance, no dictatorship, but there is authority and submission.

And it is the very design of the trinity that God uses to teach us how marriage is to work. This is the truth of 1 Corinthians 11:3—as God is about to discuss the role of women He makes this statement about the trinity as the reason why there are different roles in marriage. "*I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman and God is the head of Christ.*"

The principle of authority and submission in marriage is not an outdated first century stagecoach rule. Authority and submission are qualities that are found in the very person and character of the unchanging God of the universe. The submission of a woman in a marriage to her own husband is not something men dreamed up. The principle and practice of submission has been around as long as God has existed—an eternity.

So submission is a godly quality. Submission is a God-like attribute—just like acts of love show others who God is, acts of submission show others who God is. Submission brings God glory. And the opposite is true—lack of submission steals His glory. Look at Titus 2:5, "*being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.*" The wife submits to her husband so the word of God is not dishonored. When a wife decides not to submit herself to her husband, this will cause others to question the validity of the Word of God.

God reminds us that the role of the woman is not a culturally relative plan linked to the first century, but His perfect eternal design. He proves His point by linking this command for wives to submit to His eternal Word that never changes. Isaiah 40:8 reminds us, "*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*" If a wife chooses not to fill out her role as spelled out in the Bible, and specifically if she chooses not to be submissive, then Titus 2:5 says the Word of God is blasphemed. The word for dishonored in this verse is literally blasphemed, defamed, injured or spoken against.

Titus 2:5 says God's Word and God's character are literally slandered when a wife does not submit to her husband. Why does God use such strong language? Because submission is for our good and His glory—submission is tied to who God is and His reputation. How a wife lives in relation to her husband will either support the truth of the Bible or it will malign it—there's no middle ground.

Marriage is tough work—even the basics. Think about it. Marriage is when you agree to spend the rest of your life sleeping in a room that is too warm beside someone who is sleeping in a room that is too cold.

Ladies, are you making the Bible look untrue by your life, or does your lifestyle of submission underscore its truth? Wives, are you making it easier or harder for your husband to sustain his place of spiritual leadership? And because the wedding ceremony doesn't suddenly change the character of a person, singles, are you seeking to live submissive to God's Word and God's appointed authority in your life now? Another reason why you Christians love submission is . . .

### **#3 Submission is for the benefit of a believing wife**

Instead of an action sought to control, belittle and repress wives, the quality of submission is designed by God to be a blessing to women. How does that work?

#### **First Submission is designed to cultivate intimacy**

Every time the New Testament calls you wives to submit, it is to her own husband only. The word submit is used a total of thirty-nine times in the New Testament, and five of those times it is directed at wives, but in each reference to wives she is directed to submit to her own husband, not all women to all men. Notice what God says each time He calls wives to submit.

Ephesians 5:22, *"Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord."*

Colossians 3:18, *"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."*

1 Peter 3:1, *"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands."*

1 Peter 3:5, *"For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands."*

Titus 2:5, *"to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored."*

Four of these are participles and one an imperative command, but all of them say to wives—keep your heart, words, actions and attitudes submissive toward your own husband. Don't miss the sense of possession, an idea of intimacy, a closeness of relationship, a private friendship, a personal bond, an exclusive connection that's being illustrated here with her own husband.

If I don't submit to the coach, I am not a part of the team. If I don't submit to my sergeant, I'm court martialed out of the military. If I don't submit to my government, I am going to jail. And if a believing wife does not submit to her husband, she is not committed to her marriage, not reflective of God's character, and not intimate with her spouse. Submission to your own husband is part of what bonds you together intimately—he's your own husband, he's your husband. So through submission, expect him to function as a spiritual leader, and show him that intimate respect that only comes through submission. Submission is one of the main ways you show you belong to him and he belongs to you—it cultivates intimacy.

#### **Second Submission is initiated by a believing wife**

The Word of God strongly suggests that a wife submits herself to her husband, not that a husband ever forces his wife to submit. All five usages of the word submission for wives to their husbands in the New Testament (including Ephesians 5:22) seem to be in the middle voice. That means the action of submission is self-imposed. The wife willingly submits

herself, no one submits her. Literally, submission means a wife ranks herself under her own husband. Submission is an act a woman does herself, to herself, willingly—godly husbands are not to force their wives to submit.

Now there's a place for a husband to give a gentle reminder of submission to his own wife in a crisis, or when a wife is struggling. It is good for a husband to call his wife to trust in his spiritual leadership, but the New Testament never intended submission to be a tool of control. Did you notice there is no command in the Bible that says to men, "Make sure your wife submits"?

Husbands are not to demand the submission of their wives. Instead, husbands are commanded to love their wives as Ephesians 5 says, "*just as Christ also loves the church and gave Himself up for her.*" The husband is to be the initiator of love, the initiator of sharing God's perspective, the initiator of seeking to obey God's Word. And his wife is to submit herself to his leadership; and her submission is a decision she makes for herself, under God's design.

Have you noticed what this does for a marriage? The husband dies to his will to serve his wife, and the wife dies to her will to submit to her husband. God's plan is not for either of you to merely get from marriage, but for both husband and wife to be giving to their spouse. And submission is a wife's duty to give to her husband. That doesn't mean she is to wait for submissive feelings to come, or to wait until her husband is worthy of her submission (that won't happen), or for her to submit only to what she wants to submit to. But each godly woman actively pursues submitting to her husband.

It is like a great play with two equally qualified actors—one plays the lead role, the other plays the supporting role. The lead actor doesn't force the other to play the supportive role, nor does the supporting actor resent or try to upstage the lead actor, but both seek to completely fill out their role to create a great performance. God designed the roles for our happiness and His glory. And I am sure you realize, husbands, that a wife's submission makes you responsible to be the kind of man that can be respected, trusted, and followed. Hold your place in Ephesians 5, and turn to 1 Peter 3.

A teacher at a woman's conference asked the ladies if any of them were struggling with mothering their husbands. One lady raised her hand and the teacher said, "So you struggle with mothering your husband?" She said, "Mothering? I thought you said smothering." Men, don't be that husband.

### **Third Submission is an internal heart lifestyle**

Turn to 1 Peter 3:1, "*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.*" Consider the Christian woman who errantly married a non-Christian husband. How can she now be a witness to her lost husband?

She does it not by talking but by walking. Submission can't merely be done through conversation. A wife's best witness to her unsaved husband is through her heart behavior of living in submission to him and to the Lord. Why? Because that will be proof positive of God's supernatural work in the heart of the wife. A woman never submits by nagging her husband to be what she wants him to be. Submission is not primarily said with words, but shown in behavior and attitude.

Wives are not supposed to be like the lady that was asked by her girlfriend, “Did you wake up grumpy this morning?” And she answered, “No, I always let him sleep in!” So why does a wife even submit to an unsaved husband? Because she is not in rebellion to God or God’s design for marriage—she is a submissive witness to a world that is in rebellion to God. Even if her world includes an unsaved husband, she knows that by her submission she may win him.

Look at 1 Peter 3:2—submission takes place when a wife actively pursues pure and respectful behavior. First Peter 3:2 says, “*As they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.*” Proverbs 31 impresses us because this woman lives out such godly behavior she becomes trustworthy, supportive, productive, sacrificial, enterprising, hardworking, and wise. According to the Bible, submission has nothing to do with inferiority or weakness, but everything to do with impactful spiritual strength.

But submission is not merely external behavior—submission is also a matter of the heart. Look at 1 Peter 3:3 and 4, “*And let not your adornment be merely external; braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*” The wife pursues submission not merely in action, but with her heart attitude. She continually gives her whole heart to her husband in a strong, but gentle way, using great wisdom in her choice of words. Her true attractiveness is not merely external, but an internal gentleness of heart and quiet trust which God delights in. Even when she’s been hurt, instead of withholding or withdrawing, she gives her heart again to the Lord, and as a result maintains a submissive heart toward her husband.

#### **Fourth Submission is intended for Christ**

Back to Ephesians 5:22 it says, “*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, [circle this] as to the Lord.*” Literally this says to wives, submit to husbands as if your husband were the Lord Jesus Christ. Wow! You say, “He’s not, and I can’t.” That’s right, but Jesus can through you. Maybe you can’t stomach submission to your husband, but as a true Christian you can submit to Christ, and this is what Christ asks of you. Submission is done to please Christ.

This is what Peter means when he says this of Sarah in verses 5 and 6, “*For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.*” Jean reminds me, “If I call you Lord, it is only lord with a little ‘I.’” Jesus says to you wives, you submit to Me as you submit to your husband. Jesus says submit to your husband as if it were Me.

#### **Fifth Submission is all inclusive**

Look at Ephesians 5:24, which we’ll look at again, “*As the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*” That is quite a qualifying word, “in everything”, which means everything short of sin. Let me clarify four facts that submission is not,

**Fact 1 Submission in the New Testament is never expressing value but function.** Like a pilot/copilot team, like a pitcher and catcher, both roles are crucial, even though different.

**Fact 2 Submission doesn’t mean a woman can’t or shouldn’t graciously express her feelings or opinions.** Hey, when you were married you became one, like a taste of the

perfect oneness found in the trinity. To not discuss or agree on vacation spots or major family decisions is just dumb. It's foolish not to discuss and seek to be one heart. Yet the godly wife will submit from the heart if it becomes necessary for the husband to function as lead and make a decision.

**Fact 3 Submission doesn't mean the wife should indulge in sin when her husband demands it.** That is diametrically opposed to the Word of God. The word teaches a hierarchy of responsibility. We obey and honor our government, pay our taxes and fulfill our duties as citizens until the government orders us directly to disobey God—at that point we have to obey God rather than man. And the same thing is true for a biblically informed wife. Honor and obey in all things, except when your husband demands you sin—then you can't. But even then, it should be with the humble heart of Christ.

**Fact 4 Submission doesn't mean bowing to abuse.** Women are not to submit to physical abuse. She needs to entrust herself to God and seek help.

Now, look again at Ephesians 5:22. I want us to look backward and forward a few verses. Look backward first—you can't see it in the English, but in the original language the verb "be subject" in verse 22 is actually not listed in the Greek text. The verb is assumed from the previous verse where the participle "submit" is listed in verse 21 which says, "*and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*"

This participle to submit is one of the results of being filled with the Spirit, which is commanded in verse 18—look at the end of verse 18, "*but be filled with the Spirit.*" Christians are commanded to continually be being kept filled with the Spirit. This means to live every moment dependent upon God, saturated with and living by His Word, repenting of sins of commission and omission so as to not grieve or quench the Spirit, and to give yourselves to serving Christians by way of your giftedness and to sharing with non-Christians by way of the Gospel. Now don't miss the connection backward.

By connecting verse 22 on wives, to verse 21 submission, which is the result of verse 18 being filled with the spirit, God is telling us—you cannot submit the way God describes here unless you are filled with the Spirit. And of course, you can't be filled with the Spirit unless you are born again and have the Holy Spirit living in you. Wives can't submit to their husbands in their own strength—they need to be saved by being continually filled with the Spirit and practice submitting to one another in the fear of Christ. As they do, then they will be able to live out verse 22, which again says, "*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*"

The main point—if you're filled with the Spirit you'll submit. If you are filled with the Spirit, marriages will function the way God designed. If you try to live these truths out in your own strength, in the flesh, with your own ideas, according to the latest theory, you'll be frustrated and fail—it is not going to work. Men and women, you can't live the Christian life—only Christ can, and you must have Christ to have a God-blessed marriage—do you?

Now look forward a few verses. What follows the command to be filled with the Spirit is a description of the New Testament home. There are three pairs of relationships that are based upon the command to be filled with God's Spirit, and each one lists the submissive one first and the headship one second.

Paul describes wives and husbands in 22 to 33, children and parents in chapter 6:1 to 4, and slaves and masters in verses 5 to 9. Each pair is built upon authority and submission in function but equality of person before Christ. So what you see when you look forward is this—

submission is not merely directed at wives, but at children and at slaves, but all Christians in verse 21. Submission is what makes relationships work and brings order to the household, the Church and the government.

And the most convicting truth found in verses 22 to 33 is this. Men, husbands, my brothers—in this entire section, verses 22 to 33 on marriage, on wives and husbands, there are only two commands. They're both present tense continual action, to be lived out all the time. And they are both the same verb—and they are both directed at men. That's it, only two commands, which in the original really stand out, showing us the author's intended focus and punch. They are the same verb, continual action and both directed at husbands.

Where are they? Verse 25 and verse 33—both of them say, "*Husbands [continually] love your wife.*" God says the main issue in marriage is husbands love your wife—everything else in this passage and in marriage is secondary. The implication is this—if husbands would only do this, for the most part, everything else is going to fall into place. It is true—I have never met a believing wife who battled with submission when her husband loved her the way Christ loves you. Let's pray.