

**Notes: *The Submissive Wife* (Eph. 5:22-24, 33)**

**Intro:** Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church (25). Wives must submit to their husbands as to the Lord. The exhortations appear simple enough but lest we misunderstand the wisdom of Scripture, we must clarify the issues involved.

**#1: The *requirement of the wife's submission* (22).** If the word which characterizes the husband's duty is "love", the word characterizing the wife's is "submit." But what kind of submission is actually required? Because Paul requires "submitting to one another" (21), some say that his controlling thought is for the mutual submission of believers to one another. He is not concerned about authority within marriage, we are told, but rather that Christians consider one another as more important than themselves. No one doubts such submission is required (cf. Phil 2:3) but that is not Paul's concern here: First, the same exhortation appears in the parallel passage of Col. 3:18 where no accompanying requirement for mutual submission is present. Second, the model for the husband's role is Christ's love for the church *not* his submission to the church. Christ is God's ordained servant to the church (cf. Eph. 1:22), but he never submits to it. Third, 5:22 and following describe three particular relationships (marriage, family, household) where submission is called for by one party but not for the other. Paul's point: the marital relationship must picture the relationship between Christ and the church but in different ways. The husband must love, cherish, protect, and care for his wife as Christ does the church. But the wife must honor, respect, and submit to her husband as the church does to Christ. Vs. 21 requires submission to the authority God has ordained in the three relationships described. Biblical submission is *not* the subordination of the wife's dignity. Paul's call for the wife's subjection to her husband is rooted in *creation* –in how God created the marital relationship "in the beginning". He does *not* say "women submit to men" but "wives submit to your *own* husbands." In other words, he does not say women must be subservient to men. He is not perpetuating the inferiority of women as it was found in the distorted cultures of the first C. He is defining marriage as God created it. In the beginning, the woman was not called to the subordination of a slave to a tyrant but to that of a queen to a king. Both Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Together as God's appointed King and Queen they were to rule over the earth (Gen 1:27-28). Biblical submission is an expression of the wife's dignity. God saw Adam's loneliness and condemned it as "not good." So he intervened by making him "a suitable helper" and Adam praised her as "bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh." Husbands and wives are one in dignity and glory. One in every respect but authority. The marital relationship reflects the relationships between the persons of our Triune God. Our God is one yet he eternally exists as three Persons. Each Person possesses the fullness of deity. Yet without a hint of inferiority the Son submitted to the Father's will by coming into this world to die and redeem sinners. And the Spirit submits to the Father and Son by applying that redemption to sinners. So too the wife to the husband. She submits "as to the Lord" (22). That changes everything! There is no greater dignity than submission to the Lord. In submitting to the authority of the husband the wife submits to the authority of Christ as Christ does to the Father. Her submission is an act of obedience to Christ whom she loves.

**#2: The *reasons for the wife's submission.*** The restoration of God's purpose. At creation Eve naturally fulfilled her role as Adam's helper. But that purpose was overturned by the serpent. Gen 3:1ff; shows that the serpent confused Eve about what God said which amounted to confusing her about what he husband told her. She listened to the serpent rather than Adam and

thus God. Adam was present but remained silent (3:6). Eve listened to the Serpent, Adam to Eve. Her “desire” for her husband (Gen 3:16) is a desire to master him (cf. the usage of “desire” in Gen. 4:7). Christ came to restore the relationship. He obeyed where Adam and Eve failed. He accepted the judgment that we all deserve. As a result, the new life of the Spirit begins to restore what was destroyed by Adam’s sin. The completion of her partner. Submission is pouring oneself into the completion of another. The sacrificing of self to make the marital relationship and one’s husband whole.

**#3: The *responsibilities of the wife’s submission* (33).** To respect her husband. Paul is dealing with husbands and wives at each one’s point of greatest weakness. A man’s temptation is to use his position to enforce dictatorial rule or indulge in passive self-absorption. A woman’s is to use the power of words and emotions to diminish and undermine her husband’s authority. A man will try to dominate by strength and a woman to control with shame. But the husband has no right to intimidate his wife and the wife has no right to shame her husband. To reverence her Lord (5:1-2). By faith in Christ’s sacrifice the wife is not only pardoned of sin but empowered by the Spirit. She must respect her husband out of her reverence for her Lord who loves her and gave himself for her.

Recommended Readings: *The Intimate Marriage* by R. C. Sproul and *Each For The Other* by Bryan Chapell