

Fact Sheet for **“Submission”**  
**Ephesians 5:22-32**

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Today we come to an oft quoted passage that can be challenging, but not impossible, to apply.

**<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.**

Let's consider several observations, not only for these verses but also for the ones following.

1<sup>st</sup> – The word “submit” is not the word “obey”.

The word “obey” in traditional wedding vows was introduced by the Church of England in 1549 when it released its first Book of Common Prayer. The Reformed Catholic Church required grooms to promise to “love, cherish and worship” and brides to pledge to “love, cherish and obey”. The word “submit” can be literally translated “place under”, and it is context that will further define what is meant.

2<sup>nd</sup> – The word “submit” does not appear in the Greek of verse 22. It is understood from verse 21. However in Paul's letter to the Colossians he does write the word “submit” as an imperative (Col. 3:18).

3<sup>rd</sup> – This submission on the wife's part has to do with the husband's headship in the marriage (Eph. 5:23). Paul wrote similar words to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:3).

Men, think about it. When a woman says “I do” in her marriage she is giving you something very precious and valuable. Up to that point she has been the head of her own life in her singleness. When she gets married she gives that headship to you.

4<sup>th</sup> – These verses have clear instruction for wives, but there is also a subtle message for husbands. A husband needs to embrace the concept of his headship in his own marriage.

Here's an interesting thought. When Adam and Eve fell, their sin clearly produced these three results: 1) they were ashamed of their nakedness, 2) they hid from God, and 3) they blamed others. But who sinned first? Was it Eve who first took a bite of the forbidden fruit? Or was it Adam, who was with her, and chose not to exercise his appropriate headship? I can't say for absolutely certain, but Romans 5:12 does cause me to wonder:

**<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.**

5<sup>th</sup> – The word for “love” throughout this whole passage is “agape”.

6<sup>th</sup> – Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

I like to mention Jesus' own words in John 15:13 here. And husbands, the word “love” is an imperative in Ephesians and in Colossians 3:19. When we are harsh with our wives we are not showing love to them.

**<sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.**

The word “should” can be translated “ought to”. Husbands have an obligation before God to love their wives.

**<sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body.**

Think about how you would like to be treated. How would your wife like to be treated?

Now let's go back to Ephesians 5:21 for a minute. The word “submit” has a particular grammatical form in this verse which should be translated “submitting yourself”. Paul in this verse writes that we are to submit ourselves to one another. Ephesians 5:22-32 then go on to describe this mutual submission to one another in three couplets, the first of which is wives and husbands.

7<sup>th</sup> – Paul's words to husbands then describe how husbands are to submit themselves to their wives.

This has nothing to do with headship. It has everything to do with love. Think about your obligation to love them with the kind of love Christ had for the church. Place their needs over yours in love. But there is a balance here between your headship in the marriage and your obligation to love your wife. Both must be true in order for the marriage to be sound. Paul then goes on to cement the idea that husbands should love their wives as themselves by quoting Genesis 2:24.

**<sup>31</sup> "THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."**

If you love your wife you love yourself. And this is a picture of Christ's love for the church.

**<sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**

**<sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.**

I mentioned earlier that the Reformed Catholic Church required grooms to promise to "love, cherish and worship" their wives. I think that the word “worship” came from the word “respect” here. The word is literally “fear” in the same sense that we are to fear God, and we are to “worship” him. The KJV on this verse translates this word “reverence”. However one of the extended meanings of this word is “respect”.

Take a moment and think about real problems that exist in marriages between Christians because their marriage relationship is out of step with Ephesians 5:22-32.

Here are some practical suggestions.

1. Young women, when you consider marrying someone ask yourself, “Is this the kind of man whose headship I would be pleased to be under?” Look at his spirituality. Look at his words. Look at his actions. Look at his character. Don't assume you can make the necessary changes in him after you are married. Don't let your emotions blind you to this.

2. Young men, get comfortable now with embracing the position of headship in marriage once you are married. Don't wait to think about this until you are actually getting married. Think what it will mean to love your wife in this way. Prepare yourself in your character. Be righteous in your posts on Facebook.

3. Husbands, always strengthen the love for your wife. Think about your words to her. Embrace headship in the family unreservedly.

4. Wives, keep your commitment to your husband's headship strong.

5. Husbands and wives, work out your own balance with one another.