

Submission in Christian ethics - marriage

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[0 : 00] If you are visiting this evening, we're going through the book of Ephesians, and I think I got the short straw to deal with submission in marriage.

! To others looking on at your marriage, does it look happy, harmonious?

Or if you're not married, which is some of you here, how would you expect it to work? Now, I dare say, as you think about people you know, you can probably think you've seen every version of this. But what about, have you seen a dominant wife and the husband opting out? There's, I did read up that some years ago in a Russian newspaper, whether there's anything significant about the Russians, they reported a light-hearted poll of 100 Soviet households.

And in 90 of the homes, the wife described herself as the head of the family, and the husband agreed. And in nine of the families, the husband said he was the boss, but the wife disagreed.

[1 : 26] And the only husband whose wife named him as head of the family was told by the newspaper that he'd won an award. And when asked to select his prize, he turned to his wife and asked, what shall I choose?

Okay? But, joke of the part, I think we all know there are some dominant wives that are running things. And actually, the husbands are just turned off out of it.

The other options you will find, some who very much think that they're both equally in charge. I suppose to people who have no God and no thought of the future, and if your focus is entirely on getting the most for you out of this life, that's a very logical way that a lot of people go.

And perhaps sometimes you've seen hints of a husband using maybe his physical strength to be a bit more authoritarian, and the wife cowers and is rather oppressed.

So, one Christian author, and I don't swallow everything this guy says, and I'm illustrating this as just a... A Christian author says about men and women, that men want a battle to fight, an adventure to live, a beauty to rescue.

[2 : 46] And he says of women that they want to be fought for, to be part of an adventure, or to be the beauty. Nice ideas. But on what basis?

What are we looking for? Because as far as I can make out, there might be some truth in some of that, but I can't see it clearly taught in the scripture. Am I still okay?

Or do you need me to go for that one? Am I? Is it? I will try and go nearer this if you want me to.

Thank you. This is actually, some of you will know it, but this is John Eldridge.

And when he, in his book, explains this, he says, his basis of authority, think of the films men love, things they do with their free time, especially the aspirations of little boys, and see if I'm not right about this.

All I'm really getting at there, it's a nice idea, but it doesn't really have a root. It may have something in it, but it's not really got a root. So, what does 17-month-old Lucy Rigglesworth, this is my last humorous bit in the message, what does 17-month-old Lucy Rigglesworth think is the most important?

[4 : 00] And Wendy, I'm going to put you on the spot in a minute. Nana or Pa? Okay. All right, I don't have to put the microphone. Ha! Okay, I don't have to put the microphone near you.

But that's the view of a little child. She looks at the man and the woman, in our case, the grandparents. And it's part, that's my son on the left there.

So, in this potentially very divisive area, and it is really, honestly, Wendy has so much more to do with little Lucy. What does the Bible say? And that's what we're really focusing on tonight.

So, we haven't read, but we are going to read now. Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5. And although I, yeah, 21 to 33. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour.

[5 : 04] Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought 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.

For we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

So, can I just draw out, from 20 or so lines, what the key points that we're going to work through. You've seen it in verse 21.

[6 : 34] There is a general comment that we are to submit to one another. There is a specific comment that wives are to submit to their husbands, and that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the church and as their own bodies. And then the last bit, I won't give you all the answers now, but you did read it with me, a mystery.

So, first of all, there is a comment here that we should submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And the first thing I want to say is that this doesn't, to our culture, this makes you sound, ah, you know, someone's superior and someone is inferior.

And it really doesn't work like that because we know about, you might want to just turn with me to John 6. And this is the picture of Jesus and his relationship to his father.

totally equal as part of the Trinity in God. But nevertheless, verse 38, I'll just get there, if that's the right place.

[7 : 49] For I have come down from heaven, this is Jesus saying, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. So here is one, the Son, who is totally equal with God, but he is choosing the path of submitting to his father.

And in Genesis 1 and verse 27, you might want to turn there also. This is, the thought that the man and the woman have been both made in the image of God and not, let's just read what it says.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. So there is an equality between men and women.

And the other thing, if we go back to Ephesians 2, 5 now, because we need to just get back into where we were last week, there is a link between the submission comment.

We need to look back at verse 18 of chapter 5. And you'll remember that we finished last week, which Phil was dealing with. I'll just read from verse 18.

[9 : 08] It says, do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. And there are actually four things following here that link back to that comment about being filled with the Spirit.

Speaking to one another with psalms, etc. Singing and making music. Always giving thanks. And actually, although the, I don't know how your English Bible is splitting it up, but the submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ actually links back to being filled with the Spirit.

But just to confuse it, it is, this is a participle that can be used in the imperative. And I think because it is leading on to some other things here, it is also put in a, it's not just put in submitting to, but it's leading on to what the subject's coming up.

I don't know where I overstepped myself. But the one another here, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, this is not primarily identifying a particular authority in another person. This is simply looking at the example of Christ, who although he was Lord, you can think of so many examples, I'm not going to look up, them up with you now, of his attitude as one who serves, whether he was amongst his disciples wanting to wash their feet to teach them something.

But this is the idea of just submitting to one another out of love, isn't it? And you know these verses very well in Philipians 2, I'm sure.

[10 : 42] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interest of others.

Now, we pass over this quite quickly, but if you're here and you're perhaps not a Christian, this is a big deal, because if you want to be a Christian, you are going to put your will on one side, and you are going to learn to put other people first if you are following Jesus.

So whether you are a husband or a wife, you are learning, before we get into any more detail, to put others first.

Okay? And in the context of what's going on in Ephesus, for those who haven't been here before, we've seen a theme in this book, is about unity and purity.

We've seen the Jews and the Gentiles being brought together, and we have new, imagine them, new converts from a very wide variety of backgrounds, and they're being encouraged to submit to one another out of love and to express their unity.

[11 : 55] The Greek word for submission is, I'm not a scholar, but hypotasso, something like this, and it's built on the word order. The complementary word that would go with it is the Greek word exousia, and I give you an example of where you'd find them both happening, slightly off subject, but you know this first.

Let everyone in Romans 13 be subject to, and that's the hypotasso, means the governing authorities, because there's no authority, and that's the exousia word, except that which God has established.

So there is a principle of being subject to and someone appointed by God in authority. But interestingly, as you look at Ephesians 5, and you move on to the role of husbands, and in fact it goes on to parents and masters, the word exousia is not there for authority at all.

Rather, and this covers looking ahead to husbands, parents, and masters, they are to think of the other party's best interest.

Right, so although we have that uncomfortable bit that women are feeling that this is all that wife submitting, the men are not actually told, the husbands here are not told to exert and rule over.

[13 : 21] that's not in the passage. Rather, they are told to love their wives and care for them. And this will come out in a little bit more detail as we go.

And in the context of what is coming up, I think Jerome is doing next week, parents, not to provoke your children, but to bring them up in the way of the Lord. Masters are not to threaten their slaves. That's what's coming just beyond what we read. So then we go on to the bit for wives. And this is verse 22, chapter 5.

Submit to your own husbands as you do to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. So, there are three things here. The first one is just a few words on the end of the first sentence, as you do to the Lord.

So the wives' submission is don't just see your husband, look beyond him to the Lord. He is the one who you are submitting to primarily.

[14 : 23] And because of that, you will want to follow him and submit to your husband. So that's a simple point. But then the second one is, it talks about, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

So this has its roots in creation. And I think it might just do us well to have a few moments in Genesis 2, if you want to turn towards that. Genesis 2 and verse 18.

Just reminding you of how this happened. Man has been made. The Lord God says, it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. And so it goes on that he was brought the animals, he named them, but there was no suitable helper to be found.

So, and in the sleep, so the Lord calls, I'm in verse 21 now, so the Lord caused, God caused the man to fall into his sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs and then closed them up, and the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.

So woman was made as a helper for man, and if headship isn't expressly stated in the Genesis count, it is worth seeing that when you know the story that Adam had been told not to eat of a certain fruit, he must have told Eve that, because she knew it when she was being talked to by the devil, she succumbs and then gets her husband involved, but interestingly when you see at the end of it all and God comes looking, where are you Adam, and who is it that responds back, there is at least an implication that the man has a responsibility, that although they have both, messed up, and ultimately it is a picture, the wife's primary thing is not so much that she was particularly prone to be

gullible, but she just usurped his authority, so she moved in a direction she shouldn't have at that point, but what else was going on, you know the verses quite well, the man was with her, and he didn't do anything, so there's a bit of a mess up too, a big one, because he did not exercise the headship he should have.

[17 : 06] So there are some lessons in Genesis, there are other lessons in those, 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2, I'm not really going there at the moment, but this word for head, some do interpret this in other ways, it can mean physical head, it can mean top stone in a building, there's a bit of a link to the song we sang, Cornerstone, one in primary place, it can also mean source, I didn't write that down there, but it can, so you look at each scripture and you're trying to work out, well, these are what it can mean, what does it mean in this location?

So, men are the head, husbands are the head of wives as Christ is the head of the church, so what kind of head is Christ? Let's go back to Ephesians and a little earlier than our passage, let's just read in chapter 4 verses 15 and 16.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ, from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Now, all I'm wanting to get from just looking at these things, this is a headship that expresses care rather than control, and it's a responsibility rather than a rule, and it's also worth noting that it says he is the saviour, going back to chapter, sorry, jumping forward to chapter 5 again, and verse 23, head of the church, his body of which he is the saviour.

So this again is not emphasising the lordship, but more the saviourhood of this head. So as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything, and although it sounds not so pleasant for the wives, there is actually nothing demeaning here.

[19 : 26] Go back to that passage we thought of Christ, equal with God, but willing to do as he willed, and he was not demeaned by doing that. There's not an unthinking obedience to his rule, but a grateful acceptance of his care.

That is the pattern. And here's a quote from John Stott, whenever the husband's headship mirrors the headship of Christ, then the wife's submission to the protection and provision of his love, far from detracting from her womanhood, will positively enrich it.

So there is something to be proved. So wives, are you submissive to your husbands? Do you dominate at home?

Do you nag or constantly correct your husband? You need to think about these things in relation to what the scripture is teaching us. It is not appropriate to be ruling the roost in that sense.

And that first picture of, sometimes, we might get to this if there's time for questions at the end, sometimes the man who is the head of the home is unusually passive. And it gets complicated, doesn't it?

[20 : 45] Someone's got to do some leading. And it's not always straightforward. But primarily, that's not how it should be. But if the husbands have been sitting back thinking that this is all good so far, it's all about what the women have to do, the wives, sit back and strap yourself in because the demands that God makes here are very demanding in terms of the example of Christ.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her and to present her to him as a radiant church without any blemish but holy and blameless.

That's in verses 25 to 27. Now the word here for love, many of you will know this Greek word agape. If you're just pausing and thinking about typical affection that was known about between husbands and wives in the surrounding cultures, this was very normal.

Paul's stoic contemporaries taught husbands to love but they used a weak Greek word, philio, and it was the Christian teaching that introduced strong, sacrificial, agape love.

So before you get too far into this, this is strong, sacrificial love that the men are called to exercise. Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church.

[22 : 26] Now think about Christ and his devotion to the church and you're thinking about the bridegroom in this case and his devotion to the bride. Look again at verses 25 to 27 and you'll find five verbs and it's worth picking them out because they're very challenging.

I've highlighted them to make it a bit easier for you there. We've dealt with love but notice that Christ gave himself up for her.

It can only mean making us think about the cross. Christ is thinking of his church and he gave himself up utterly for her. He knew that she needed the sacrifice of his death and he has this interest in making her holy.

He gives his people, his church, his spirit. He's constantly at work making you more holy. Cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

There is this idea that he certainly carries the initial idea of coming as it were in dirty rags and being cleansed from sin but it has the ongoing idea of being reminded I think and feeding on the word and being reminded of these basic things.

[23 : 46] What is the aim to present her? to himself as a radiant church and it's worth just catching that vision of Christ looking ahead to a wedding.

This is Revelation 19. Just a few bits missed out. But let us rejoice and give him glory for the wedding of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. So husbands think about this, Christ loving the church.

You see all this focus and this action and this effort. He loves her. He gave himself up for her, cleansing her, to make her holy, to present her faultless.

So husbands, are you exercising this kind of love for your wife? So we've been thinking about the church. Is that love you have, strong sacrificial love?

[24 : 59] Is it the kind that when it comes to the crunch you will give yourself, if necessary, for her? Even to the point of death, I'd suggest, is implied here in this love.

Cleansing her, wanting to remind her of all of the reasons that we have been made clean in Christ, to make her holy with a vision for how she can be more fulfilled in her walk with God, to make her shine and to present her faultless at the end.

Have you got that kind of image? Do you think of your wife and say, where is she now? Where would I like her to be? How can I help her grow in Christ?

This is serious stuff. It is interesting when we just think back to the idea of the radiant church.

We talked about presenting her, Jesus wanting to present the church to himself. The word, I think, means something about a wedding dress, but it also means more.

[26 : 09] I think the Greek word is in doxos. Part of that is the word doxa for glory. There is this shining forth that Christ is looking for in his church, wants to have her shining forth.

There is the example of what you want to be trying to do, thinking of your wife. What sort of vision do you have for her? The second thing coming up here, much more mundane, really.

Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. This is in verses 28 and 29. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own body. He who loves his wife loves himself.

We feed and care for our own bodies. It's very appropriate guidance as husband and wife have become one flesh, which Paul goes on to explore.

people. Because you're one, loving your own body, that becomes quite an important thing in terms of it's common sense that if you're sometimes thinking husbands and wives are these very separate people trying to work out how to get some order, they are actually one.

[27 : 24] That's the teaching. Then we come to the last part of the passage, which is this mystery. And I'll read it again from verse 30.

For we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

And that's a quote from Genesis 2. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each of you must also love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband.

So, we've been talking about the church as Christ's bride and we've been talking about us as the body, but the way this fuses together is that Christ's bride and his body are the same, one and the same.

So that quote we've read out, initially the one flesh makes you think of the husband and the wife, but it's clearly spelled out that Paul is thinking of Christ and his church.

[28 : 32] Now, when you think of this oneness, go back to Ephesians 2, actually, we mentioned that drawing attention to how Jews and Greeks had been brought together.

Let me just read verses 15, 2 verse 15. By setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations, his purpose was to create in himself, this is Christ, his purpose was to create in himself

one new humanity out of the two, Jew and Greek and these different people, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God.

So there's an example of this oneness that is happening as people are drawn together in Christ. So one other implication of the fact that we are so inextricably one with Christ, and this is a rather beautiful idea if we've been thinking of authority and who's in charge, but there is this aspect of being part of a body that the head is actually not complete without the body and the body is not complete without the head.

So the head may have a responsibility, may have an overall oversight, but there is a sense in which we need each other. So I'm just going to sum up the main things to get the thrust of this.

I'm hoping, I think we do have time, that when I've just summed up, which I think is the teaching of this passage, I'm going to put a few questions up on the screen in a minute after I've done a summary, and just see where it goes.

[30 : 18] There's probably too many questions. I don't think we can go into groups, but you might want to, just a few minutes, some of you might want to make a comment, but some of the questions up on there might provoke, but let's just finish where we're going.

Men, I said it earlier in the message, but I'll say it again, they are never commanded to rule our wives, but to love them. So you were reading through the first part of this, expecting to find men rule over your wives.

It doesn't say that. It tells you to love, and we've been through how strong and sacrificial that love is. This is not the power of a superior over an inferior.

It is more a responsibility than a right. It's an authority to serve, an opportunity to lead. It is circumscribed by scripture, in other words, the man doesn't give out orders and have anything he wants done.

It is held there, and if you find a conflict, we obey God rather than men. it does mean, this is where the rubber hits the road, it does mean making a final decision when an agreement is not achieved, but I quickly add that you can delegate that.

[31 : 34] If you're always delegating, it might suggest a weak headship, but there's no real problem. You can say, yes, I'm responsible for this, but you can delegate in those decisions, and that doesn't mean that you're not part of making that final decision.

It involves gentleness, sensitivity, and honoring of one's wife, loving as your own body, and as Christ loved the church.

And the wife's submission in marriage is a particular example of the general Christian duty that came up in verse 21, and it's to be given this submission to a lover, not to an ogre, and the husband is to love like Christ, sacrificing in order to serve.

And the submission of the wife is but another aspect of the love. And I really, I've got one quote on the next slide, but there's something beautiful. We started about how is your marriage, and does it feel like arguing and someone dominating?

But when this really works, is a kind of, this love that the man is meant to give is a serving love.

[33 : 01] There is something very beautiful when this works out. It doesn't have the hallmark of the man constantly issuing commands. That's not headship. That's more insecurity, I think.

But just on the odd occasion when there is perhaps a crunch, and I think they're very rare, but when there is an odd occasion, there is a responsibility here, the scripture teaches, that we cannot get away from.

Here's just a few words from John Stott, which I think are very helpful. Having quoted that Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, in order to cleanse her, sanctify her, and ultimately to present her to himself in full splendor and without any defect.

But in other words, his love and self sacrifice were not an idle display, but with a purpose, and his purpose was not to impose an alien identity upon the church, but to free her from the spots and wrinkles which mar her beauty, and to display her in her true glory.

The Christian husband is to have a similar concern. His headship will never be used to suppress his wife, love. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing toward that glory, that perfection of fulfilled personhood, which will be the final destiny of those whom Christ redeems.

[34 : 31] To this end, Christ gave himself, and to this end too, the husband gives himself love. So that's the end of what I want to say, but I think I will just put up some questions and just let the meeting become a little bit more open for a few minutes.

I don't propose to work through those. I'm really just saying at the moment, is there anything that I've said, and if you ask me anything too difficult, I probably won't know the answer, but if you want to ask a question about anything, that's fine.

If I don't know the answer, some here will. But if you find any of those questions interesting and want to say something, I think for five or ten minutes, we have got a roving microphone.

And we can have the meeting open. Then we'll pause for communion and then we'll sing the power of the cross just before communion.

So, any thoughts?