

Wives?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 January 2011

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's read together from Ephesians chapter 5, page 1177, Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 5, verse 22, wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

I think there are two things we need to understand very clearly before we can grasp what is being taught here. I think before we even try and understand it, we need to try and clear away all the prejudices and all the barriers that there are, all the preconceptions that we might have, and all the ideas that are fed to us in a modern world and that don't arise out of the Bible. As Christians, we take everything from the Bible. We live and move and have our being in God. We derive our opinions and our worldview and our lifestyle from the Bible, and we do so happily, and we do so willingly and voluntarily and in love and rejoicing that that is the way that God has established for us. The minute we begin to lose sight of that

Bible-centered thought, then we get into trouble. And so I want to ask you to clear away any kind of prejudice that you might have which gives you a negative view of this verse. There is nothing in the Bible about which we need to take a negative view, and it's only sin within us that takes, that leads us to take that destructive opinion that puts the Bible in second place. I want to suggest, first of all, that we look back to verse 21 because we will not understand the context of 22 if we come all of a sudden with our own ideas to it. We need to remember that Paul is talking about the Spirit-filled, Christ-cross-centered life.

He is not saying that as a wife that God demands you to be a slave to your husband and everything. Neither is he saying that if you are a husband that you have any right to be a tyrant over your household or your wife. The words that we find here, they take place within a particular context, and it's one which I'm going to call the context of accountability. We've been looking this whole passage at the Spirit-filled, cross-centered life, the life that is modeled on Jesus' death on the cross.

[3 : 43] Remember how we said that Jesus' death was the payment for our sins, the procurement of the forgiveness that Jesus comes to us with tonight and that we can have in Jesus Christ. But it's also the model of the Christian life in which we put others before ourselves and live for the sake of others as Jesus did for us. Let this mind be in you, says the apostle that was in Christ Jesus.

Though he was in the form of God and yet thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself nothing, made himself of no reputation. That's the motto of the Christian life. And that's what it means to be submitting. Verse 21, to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. In other words, God has taken us, if you've trusted in Jesus this evening, he's taken you and he's put you amongst other Christians. Of course, we're in a world, in a world of all kinds of people, but we're in a world, Paul's particularly talking about other Christians, people who belong to you and to whom you belong as a church. They're your friends. They're your brothers. They're your sisters in Jesus.

There ought not to be a bond that's closer in the world and the bond between one Christian and another. And it's a bond in which we need to submit. We recognize the place that everyone has, our need of one another, and our accountability to one another. What God is saying to us here is you can't live the Christian life without one another. You can't live without their help. You can't live without being open to them about the way you're living the Christian life and without asking them and requiring of them their advice and their input into your life. Neither can you live without serving them in the God-appointed way. What did Jesus do? He took the towel and he went around all his disciples and he washed their feet to the horror of Peter. He washed their feet and he said, as I have done to you, so you must wash one another's feet. That's what it means to submit to one another out of reverence for Jesus. In other words, we take seriously the counsel and the fellowship and the knowledge of other Christians.

We want to know what they want to offer us. We want, and in time as we grow in the Christian life, we want others to come to us and to ask us for various pieces of advice and for the counsel which God has given, the experience that God has given to us along the Christian way. You can't live the Christian life, says Paul, without one another. Now, of course, there are occasions and there are circumstances in the world where there are very few Christians. I'm not talking about those. He's talking in the north, in the main. Life is communal. Of course, that doesn't mean we all live in the same house, but it means that the way God designed his church is to do things together and to be together and to be close to one another, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. That means I am accountable to you and you are accountable to one another and you're accountable to me and to one another. Not in any way as if one is superior over the other. There's no superiority in the church.

Every single one of us is on the same level. Everyone needs one another and we need to pray for one another and guide one another in love in the way that the Lord has given to us. Now, you say, well, that may not be a very accurate picture of the Christian church. We need to make it that way. It's no use giving up and holding your hands up in horror and saying, oh, well, I don't see much of that in the Christian church. And well, if it's not, then we need to work at it. Submitting yourselves, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. That's the command. That's the context in which this command is given for wives to submit to your own husbands. It's in the context of the spirit-filled cross-centered life. And I hope that as we go through this, the barriers will come down and that we perhaps begin to see that the opinions and the feelings that we hold don't come from the Bible at all, that they come from the world around us. And if that's the case, I'm asking you tonight to put God in the first place and to try and work towards living your life the way God intended, rather than take our ideas from what we see and what we hear around us. So that's the first thing, our accountability to one another. We are accountable to one another. But the next thing I want us to see this evening, next context in which these words are written, is the context of what authority really means. Let's just stop for five minutes or so and think about what does authority really mean? Because when we have submission, we're entering into the whole area of authority. What does it mean in the Bible?

Because our understanding of the word will depend perhaps on where you are in the world and it will depend on the society that you belong to. For example, in a master-slave relationship as it was then, if Paul mentioned authority then to a slave, he would think of it probably negatively because he would think of it in terms of the cruelty and the unreasonableness of his master because masters very often were unreasonable at that time. If he mentioned the word authority to a master, he would be okay with that because for him, authority was tyranny in which he could demand anything he wanted from his slave and from his household. Neither of these are really what authority means in the Bible. Once again, we have to check ourselves and pull ourselves back from thinking of words in terms of their definition from the world and the society that we belong to. Let's think of then about what real authority is as it appears in the Bible.

[9 : 45] It originates in God. That's the very first thing we need to be absolutely certain about. God who has the power, the ultimate power to command and at the same time effect what he commanded.

The ultimate authority of God lies in those very first words at the very beginning of the Bible. Let there and God said, let there be light and there was light.

That's what I call ultimate original authority. Not only is he able to say the word, but he's actually going to do it by the word of his power.

But God in this world has delegated authority to in various areas, various structures in the world. For example, I guess the first thing that comes to my mind is government and those who exist to preserve law and order and judgment in the world. You may think that the authority they have over us as a society is something that arose out of common sense and democracy and civilization.

[10 : 58] It didn't. It arose out of the Bible and it is a delegated authority from God. There is nothing random about the laws which govern us even in our atheistic, pluralistic world that we live in.

They are rooted and grounded in the Ten Commandments. And I know that they're being eroded and I know that with every week that passes, there is yet another threat to the integrity of law and order and the kind of rules and the kind of laws which are being passed.

Yet nevertheless, even so, we can still recognize that the principles by which our society is governed are grounded on the Ten Commandments.

The authority that the government has over us is a delegated authority given by God. And it's very important to recognize that that exists.

And it's a real authority. It's a real one. But it's also a limited authority. No government has a right to tell you what to say in your own home, what kind of clothes to wear, what food to eat.

[12:09] They don't have ultimate authority. Only God has that ultimate final authority over us. Government does. And there are a few occasions, for example, where the Bible, in the Bible, that comes across very clearly.

For example, when Saul was pursuing David, he was abusing the authority that God had given him. And he had crossed the line that God had drawn from him.

But yet, when David had the opportunity, I think Kenny, I was thinking about this a couple of weeks ago, when David had the opportunity to bring him down, he chose not to.

Why was that? Because he recognized the place that God had given to Saul. And out of reverence and out of respect for that, out of fear for God, he chose not to kill him.

Jesus, when he appeared before Pontius Pilate, he said, when Pilate talked about his authority, Jesus said, you would have no authority if it hadn't been given you from above.

[13:08] And yet, he then voluntarily placed himself under the judgment of a pagan ruler. Because he recognized, amongst other things, of course, he knew that this was God's way of saving sinners.

And he knew that this was the atonement in which he would pay the price for our sins. And yet, it was under the authority of Pontius Pilate. And Paul, in fact, tells us in Romans chapter 13 that we are to obey the magistrates and the civil powers because they exist.

And it was quite amazing to think of him saying that in a pagan world, where the Roman Empire was paid no attention or paid no regard to the gospel, and yet Paul still regarded.

And what that means to us is that as Christians, we have to respect and obey the rules that are there given. Whether we agree with them or not, we have to pay respect.

And we have to be law-abiding citizens in every respect because we're out of fear and out of love for God and recognition that it's the Lord that has given the government the authority that they have.

[14:21] But we pray also that they will recognize that as well. They will recognize their accountability to the Lord. We also have authority in the church. Again, it's a limited authority, but it is a real authority.

And insofar, as church leaders, they implement God's word. And then, as we recognize God's word, then we yield ourselves, all of us yield ourselves to the word of the Lord.

It's a limited authority. Church leaders can't tell you what to wear or what to eat or where to go for your holidays. Of course they can't. There's not... That kind of authority is not tyrannical, but it exists within the bounds of the people of God.

And we are all answerable to one another. They are answerable to you, and you are answerable to them. And I am answerable to them, and I am answerable to you. We are accountable to one another.

It gives no room for a breach. But the home is another place where there is authority. A structure has been placed, and we are all under authority, and some of us exercise authority in society, and we have to be very careful with that.

[15:41] Because, you remember, the man who Jesus came across, the centurion, and how he said that he would go with the centurion to heal his servant.

It's very interesting what that man said to Jesus, isn't it? Do you remember what he said to Jesus? He said, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, for I am a man under authority.

I say to this servant, go, and he goes, and come, and he comes. But notice the first thing that he said was, I am a man under authority. That's a very, very important and insightful comment that he made.

It's a great statement, that. And it applies to every single one of us. When we are given authority, we're given responsibility before God.

Do you think of yourself as a manager? If you're a manager today, you've got people working for you. Do you see yourself as accountable to God for the way in which you conduct yourself in your business?

[16:45] Well, it's true. The authority you have is given to you by God. Do you remember the huge responsibility that's placed upon you? And the awesomeness of that responsibility.

You know, people say, oh, it must be great to be a manager. It's not great at all. Because the responsibility is huge. It's enormous. And nobody who's a Christian and recognizes that authority can be anything else but extremely nervous when it comes to the exercise of authority. It's the same with me. Tonight, my authority is limited to my preaching, my teaching of the word of God. I mustn't go beyond that. But I'm not here tonight to exercise any other kind of authority. There's nothing. But if I say something that is according to the Bible, then as you recognize it as God's word, then you yield yourself, not to me, but to God whose word it is. That's the way authority exists. And we are to be responsible and we are to be accountable. And we are to recognize the great responsibility that we have.

[17:57] But there's a third aspect, and that is appointment. The appointment of God is such that where he has structured either society or marriage or the home and where that authority exists, there has to be the exercise of that authority, which means there has to be the leading and there has to be the following.

See, let me compare a husband and a wife to a session, say, for example. A session always has more than three men. Never get a session of two men.

And the way they come to decisions, if there's disagreement, is that they take a vote. One person will say, this is what I move, and the other person will say, this is what I move. And there'll be a vote when there is a disagreement.

And the majority carries the day. That becomes the decision of the session of the elders. It's the same with a presbytery. It's the same with a general assembly. That's the way that authority exists within the church because we have a multiplicity of components, if you like, people.

But that can't be true in a husband and a wife because you've only got two. And where you've only got two, you can't take a vote because there's no majority. So how then do you recognize and how then do you implement what is the right thing to do?

[19:35] Well, this is where God, in his own wisdom, has structured the home in such a way that one leads. And where you have one leading, you have to have one follower. You can't have two leaders.

You can't have two followers. It's a logical, sensible way to operate. Now, the first thing we need to do is we need to, in recognition that this is God's doing, we have to receive this joyfully.

We have to receive this without any hesitation at all. This is as much the word of God as anything else. So whatever else, whatever feelings come into our mind, and no matter how many, perhaps, barriers go up, we have to understand this is God's word.

I'm sure there won't be that many barriers going up, but it's God's word. And the way to receive God's word is to understand it. But yet, at the end of the day, all of us, every one of us, and next week, God willing, we'll be talking about the husband's role.

Tonight, we're talking about wives, husbands, and Christ and the church. To next week, we're going to be talking about husbands and wives, and Christ and the church. And then the next week, the third week, we're going to be talking about the home, the whole relationship within the home, as it relates to Jesus and the church.

[20:57] But tonight, we're talking about the authority that God has graciously and lovingly placed within our homes that is absolutely necessary to have.

We need to recognize it as such, and we need to voluntarily give ourselves to it. Now, it's likely, let me just say a few things about how to understand this verse, verse 22 and verse 23.

First of all, it's likely that there was a kind of pagan emphasis on the rulership of women in Ephesus. You remember way back in Acts, that the god that they worshipped was a goddess, and she was called Artemis or Diana of the Ephesians. So it's very likely that the whole society, in worshipping a woman goddess, would have been woman-oriented.

So there could be very good and very specific reasons why Paul was battling against this orientation that there was in the society in Ephesus at that time.

[22:10] The second thing I need to say is that these verses do not even begin to suggest an inferiority of women. The Bible does not make women inferior.

It respects women. In fact, it is through the influence of the Christian faith that many societies where women were treated with great cruelty and abuse have been set free from that.

The gospel has set them free. History bears testimony to that. These verses are not anti-women, and they do not suggest for a moment that women are inferior in any way.

The third thing I want to say is this, going back to 21, that whilst wives are counseled to submit to their own husbands, the husband doesn't stop being accountable to his wife.

Verse 21, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. We mustn't confuse accountability with submission or tyranny.

[23 : 26] They're not opposed to one another. We are all, as I said before, accountable to one another. And I am accountable to my wife for my life, the way I live my life.

If I do something unreasonable, and if I act in a way that is bizarre and unloving, or something which is clearly opposed to the Bible, my wife has every right to say to me, why are you acting like that?

You're a Christian. Here is what it says in the Bible. She would not be loving me if she didn't say that. And submission doesn't mean silence.

It doesn't mean, it doesn't mean blindly going away, going along with everything, whether it's right or whether it's wrong. That doesn't make sense at all for any Christian relationship, let alone a marriage.

Submission does not mean silence. Let me say something else. That submission does not mean that a husband does not take his wife's views into account.

[24 : 44] The whole point of a marriage is communication between two people. Two people who have met each other because they've discovered that there's a chemistry between them.

They get on well together. They're attracted to one another. And they like the same things. And they talk about the same things. And they continue talking. One of the greatest dangers in any marriage as the years go by is when they stop talking to one another for whatever reason.

And we need to be very careful when that happens. We need to be very careful to work at it. And not to give up, but to recognize where things go wrong and to make sure that we focus on those things and put them right as God has given us the ability to do.

Your marriage is hugely, massively important. Massively important. Whatever you do, don't do anything to threaten that.

And if something is threatening it, then make sure you work at it. And make sure you focus on whatever it is. And make sure you ask the Lord that he will invade your marriage and intervene in whatever, in whatever areas there are of conflict or disagreement or whatever has gone wrong.

[26 : 05] Then ask him and work at putting it right. I remember hearing about a lady that got a present of a very, very precious vase.

It was a big vase. Maybe I've told you this before. But it was an heirloom. It was going back through the generations. And it wasn't only worth a lot of money.

In fact, I don't even know how much it was worth. But it belonged to this lady's forefathers. Her grandfather, maybe, or her grandmother, or her great-grandmother, and go on through the generations. And she put it on top of a wardrobe.

And one time, she opened the wardrobe too forcefully and the thing fell and smashed on the floor. Now, she could have thrown all the pieces out and got another one.

Wouldn't have cost that much to buy another vase. But she recognized that there was value and out of her disappointment and determination to preserve what was given to her, she got her superglue and she got all the pieces and put them on the table and spent hours and hours and hours reconstructing that vase until it was built once again.

[27 : 31] That's what we've got to do to our marriages when they break. Reconstruct them. God gives us, you say, you're being simplistic, you don't know us.

I know this, I have 30 years experience, so I'm not being simplistic at all. And if you think I'm somehow better than you, I'm not better than anyone.

We are all subject and vulnerable to all the different kinds of threats and the different kinds of conflicts and disagreements and things that go wrong. Every one of us are subject to the same thing.

But if you don't have the determination to recognize what God has given you in your wife or your husband, then that's where it goes wrong because you don't start on the right foundation.

And can I say this also, this is an aside, if you're going to get married, make sure you know what you're doing. I'm not trying to, I'm not trying to put a question mark in your way in any way, but just make sure you know what you're doing.

[28 : 36] Make sure you know that you're binding yourself for the rest of your life to one individual. It's a one-way ticket somebody described it once as going through a door, turning around, locking the door behind you and throwing away the key.

That's absolutely right. That's what marriage is. For better or for worse until death do us part. And I know that things go wrong and I know that some marriages go on the rocks and some marriages fail.

I know that. Nevertheless, if I was to say tonight, oh, you better not say that because there are people that, I have to say what I see in the Bible. It's just like people who say, well, you can't really talk about wives and husbands because there are single people there.

Well, a single person recognizes this is as much part of God's word as any other part of God's word. It's not my intention to offend anyone, but God forbid if we start avoiding things from the Bible just because they're difficult to talk about.

We can't do that. We've got to focus on what is in the Bible. But let me come back to what I said before. Make sure you keep speaking together. Make sure you discuss everything together.

[29 : 48] And I believe that most things can be worked out between us, a meeting of the minds. I believe that there are, there should be very few issues in which there is conflict or disagreement.

Very often, one partner changes their mind through discussion, the process of discussion. and I could never, my role as a husband or a leader never prevents me from seeing what my wife tells me and changing my mind sometimes because it makes sense.

God forbid that I should be ever so proud as to say this is my position and I don't care even if your position makes sense, I'm going to stick to my position because I'm the boss.

I've met people like that and I feel sorry for them and I feel sorry for their wives and their families because that's not the picture that is given here.

The picture of a marriage is where your wife is giving you so that you can learn from her and so that she can learn from you and what you learn from her, I speak as a man, I speak as a husband, what you learn from her is sometimes some pretty ugly stuff.

[31 : 06] Don't ever get married if you don't want to discover yourself. It's like all of a sudden looking in the mirror for the first time and seeing all the blemishes and if you're going to just avoid it and walk away and say I don't look like that that's the man who says don't tell me anything about myself I don't want to hear it well that's not a Christian marriage at all because the whole point of a Christian marriage is that your wife and your husband is God's method of sanctifying you I'm not saying that if you're single God doesn't have other methods of course he does but it's amongst other things it's God's method of sanctifying you of giving you someone who's going to have the honesty that's what Eve was always meant to be a suitable helper for Adam do you know what that word suitable helper means it means someone in whom he could see himself and that's what a wife is and that's what a husband is someone who has that closeness and that bond with us that in privacy and in love that we can share the most intimate details and sometimes the most painful details that we need to know and at the end of the day you know what more often than not

I have to sit and I say this is God speaking to me and it's a blow to the pride but don't expect please husbands don't expect that kind of blind slavish submission which gives you the ultimate authority in your house and in which you're accountable to no one that's not the Christian at all I am accountable to my wife as I am accountable to all of you tonight but ultimately accountable to the Lord for the way in which I live my life and as a Christian surely I will want to know where I go wrong well we'll see this a wee bit more of this next time when we come to discover the husband's responsibility in all of this a wife and a husband are modelled strangely enough strange as it may appear on the

Godhead himself what was it that what is so peculiar about the relationship between a husband and a wife well I believe its uniqueness arises out of the uniqueness of the God in whose image we are created and that relationship that there is within the Godhead it's a perfect relationship and it has so much to teach us about our relationships not least as husbands and wives that's why I read John chapter 5 look at what Jesus says in verse 19 Jesus says first of all let me just give two or three examples of what he says truly truly I say to you the son can do nothing of his own accord now what does that tell us about the Godhead and what does it tell us about the relationship between a husband and his wife it tells us that the persons in the Godhead are not independent of one another and a husband and a wife are not independent of one another they're tied to each other then he says then he says but only what he sees the father doing for whatever the father does the son does

likewise well there's something else the father acts and the son does likewise that's what leadership and submission in the bible is something that is celebrated it arises out of the submission in which

Jesus yielded himself lovingly and voluntarily for the sake of our salvation to the will of the father with no conflict whatsoever but it's a submission in which the father leads and the son does likewise it's that close and then it tells us for whatever for the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing what does that tell us about a marriage relationship it means that there should be openness in everything that they do there's no secrecy in a marriage relationship well at least between themselves there's no secrecy I'm not saying of course that what we do in our homes are not private between ourselves of course they are but between ourselves there is a particular intimacy in conversation and in interaction so that the person feels secure and safe and so that the person even if he or she says something that is wrong they can put it right and that the other person can lovingly correct them it tells us also submission is a chosen submission it's because we choose out of recognition of what

God commands us to do and the structure that God commands in what in the home but it's a structure of course once again going back to verse 21 in which we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ what did we say originally what did we say that was the primary principle of the Christian life the primary principle is let this mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ and the mind is to for the sake of others to put our own interests to one side that's what submission is for the sake of others to put our own interests to one side what it means is that as a wife puts her husband first before herself in recognition of what

[37 : 24] God has appointed she will out of reverence and out of fear for the Lord she will recognize what God has appointed and act accordingly but as we're going to see next week there's a sense in which the husband does the same he puts his wife's interests before his own that's what love is this is my commandment you love one another as I have loved you in giving myself for you so there should be no conflict when both serve the Lord and both live in recognition of what God has done and what what the Lord has commanded us then we happily out of reverence for the Lord and out of love for him we yield ourselves to one another the structure that

God has commanded in the context in which God has laid forth and with the willingness to obey him because it is right and because it is best and because it is the will of God but we'll see next week God willing that the husband has a massive massive responsibility let's pray