

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 5:22-24 - Wives Submit to Husbands - Part 1

This morning we begin a new section of Ephesians. This section is often referred to as the “household code” of the book. In ancient times various philosophers and religions had household codes. Basically, how they thought a household should be run for maximum benefit and flourishing of the home and therefore society.

Pagans had household codes, philosophers had household codes. And so it should come as no surprise that the Bible has something of a household code as well. God has a blueprint for how the Christian household is to operate.

We’ve seen so far that when someone comes to faith in the gospel it changes their life. It changes how we think of sin and righteousness. It changes our view of how we think of the the people of God. Believing Jews and Gentiles are no longer at odds, but we’re now one new man in Christ.

The gospel changes our view of work, church, society and government.

But here the gospel also changes how we understand our home. It changes how we view the role of husbands and wives and children and parents and slaves and masters. Those who follow the risen Lord Jesus realize pretty quickly that the gospel begins to color everything we do and I think our view of the home is one of the most important aspects of Christianity.

When I became a Christian I really had no idea what a Christian household looked like. I didn’t have that modeled for me. And it was difficult to incorporate into my life once I was married because I hadn’t seen how it worked and my church had never really taught on it.

But the Bible gives us a blueprint and it’s glorious. Christian husbands and wives realize that they are taking part in a real-life depiction of the roles of Christ and the Church. In marriage the wife portrays the Church submitting to Jesus and the husband is like Christ loving the Church.

Children realize that their parents are to be honored like Jesus, and God gives children promises for honoring parents. Parents - especially fathers - are warned against provoking our kids, but instead we’re to train them in the Lord.

Christian slaves are called to honor their masters genuinely like they would honor Christ, and masters are warned they they too have a master in heaven.

The gospel really permeates every aspect of our lives. And how we understand our role and play our role has implications for the gospel as well.

Now, this morning and next week we’re going to focus on the role of the wife. And the role of the wife is hard to preach about. First, I’m a man and telling wives they need to submit to their husbands so it can seem like a self-serving thing. Yet this is what the Bible clearly says.

Second, it’s hard because some ladies are married to authoritarians and husbands who like to control. I don’t know about anyone here, but reformed, conservative circles are not immune to control freaks. And controlling husbands love these kinds of passages because they can use them to brow beat their wives. And even good faith explanations of these passages can be used wrongly. So just know the marriage that the Bible paints should never be authoritarian, abusive or cold. It’s filled with love and gentleness and kindness and grace from both husband who leads and loves, and wife who submits.

Three, if you’re a wife, you know there have been times where you were bad at this. Where you didn’t submit, you were defiant and you know it, and your husband is right there next to you. It’s the “I told you so” feeling. And there’s a sense in which I want to comfort you by saying we’ll get to him in a couple weeks. But more I just want both husbands and wives to humbly listen to the Word.

Wives, if you haven't done a great job at submitting to your husband this is the time to repent and seek to honor Jesus all the more. Husbands, I encourage you to be gracious and encouraging to your wives who are called to the sometimes very difficult task of following you.

I think back to who I was in younger years and I cringe at the things I've said and done. If I could time travel and talk to the younger me I'd probably have some words for the younger me because I know my wife was called to follow the foolish younger me. And sometimes the foolish present me. So this isn't a time for gotchyas. This is a time to grow.

One more thing before we dive in: As Christians we should never, ever be ashamed of what the Bible says about the role of men and women or the home. Ever.

The unbelieving world thinks these passages are abhorrent, beyond the pale. These are ancient archaic passages that only a caveman would listen to. The world's mantra is "down with the patriarchy, down with traditional roles. Down with traditional families. A woman can do anything a man can do and probably better." Feminism is baked into basically every area of life and men in leadership are suspect.

How many ladies in our society if you ask them what they want to do after high school boldly say "I just want to get married and be a stay at home mom?" It used to just be what women did in our culture and in every culture for the last 6,000 years but now it's kind of rare and often looked down on.

So the Christian view of men and women and family dynamics is on the outs. But we should never be ashamed of this. I'm here to tell you that the Bible prescribes these roles for us for our good and for God's glory. God fashioned us male and female on purpose to do different things.

Men are fashioned - it's our nature - to provide and protect and lead and conquer and build and subdue and love our wives. That's good and godly and we should celebrate that as Christians.

Women are fashioned - it's your nature - to nurture your family, to submit to your husband, to flourish in the home and to be a helpmate to your husband achieving his goals for your family. That's good and godly and we should celebrate that.

So these truths are good and we shouldn't be ashamed at them.

Big Picture: Wives are to submit to their husbands. This is the simple command of the passage. Everything else around this command is designed to help us understand what and why and how submission happens.

So I have 9 observations about this and we're only getting to 1 this morning.

1. Wives are to submit to husbands. Read 22

So this is the basis for everything else we'll see. In the home the husband leads and the wife submits. This is a command from God.

Now, interestingly, in the Greek, the word submit is not even in the **Vs. 22**. It literally says "Wives, to your husbands, as to the Lord." Wives to your husbands what? Well, there's a connection to the last sentence.

Read 21-22

So Paul is connecting the command in **Vs. 21** of submitting to one another, to the command of wives to submit to their husbands.

Now, I want to mention something here. This is really important for you to grab on to especially when discussing this passage with feminists and egalitarians. An egalitarian is someone who thinks men and women are equal in every way. The Bible teaches both men and women are made in the image of God - we affirm that. Egalitarian - which is from a French word meaning equal - egalitarians believe not only are we equally made in the image of God but that husbands and wives are equal in every role and should equally submit to each other.

They say “See, look at **Vs. 21!** It says everyone is to submit to one another which means husbands should submit to wives and wives should submit to husbands. We’re all just equal, everyone gets an equal say and equal vote. There’s no distinction at all.”

Well, like we saw last week, there is a general principle of submission to one another in the broader body of Christ. We should - generally speaking - be willing to submit to one another, esteem each other highly.

But what they miss is that the general rule for all Christians is not the rule in the home.

God has designed authority structures where true submission is required because it’s a good thing. These are obvious in other areas of life:

Does a parent submit to his 3 year old demanding cookies?

Does a police officer submit to a criminal demanding to be let go?

You get the idea. No, there are limits to mutual submission. And in the marriage the wife is called to submit to the husband.

So what Paul is saying is that in the same way our general posture toward each other in the church is to submit to each other, the general posture of the wife in her marriage is to submit to her husband.

When you’re in the military and you’re a subordinate, your goal is to figure out what the commanding officer wants and how you can help achieve that.

When you’re in business, your goal is to figure out how the owner or manager wants to lead the company and help them do that. You don’t just stand there waiting for them to do something or trying to achieve your own ends. No, you want to figure out what they want and how they want the business ran.

Same is true in marriage. Wives are seek to figure out how their husbands want to lead and then help them do that. Genesis 2 makes it clear that wives are helpers to their husbands. The main burden of leadership and direction is on the husbands. And the main burden of wives is to help achieve that. Husbands should be giving the general direction of the family, but I think a great question for wives to ask regularly is “how would you like me to help?”

The word submit here is hupotasso - and it means to subordinate yourself under someone else. It’s a willingness to follow their rule and their authority. And for Christians it’s a *joyful* willingness to follow. It’s not a drudgery or a hassle.

Ladies, this is why who you marry matters. Because when you marry this is what you’re signing on to: submitting to the authority of your husband and helping him achieve the direction he sets for the family.

We need to remember that authority is a good thing. We live in America and I think for the most part we despise authority and question authority at every turn. We look at authority as intrinsically bad and usually abusive. Especially political authority. But this is a very unique view of authority throughout the history of the world. And it’s a very wrong view of authority.

If you look at the Bible, authority is given by God to people as a good thing. Kings and magistrates are given authority by God for the good of their people. Do they abuse it? Sure. But the design of authority is good. Paul even calls magistrates deacons of God in **Rom 13**. Just like elders and deacons are church officers to serve Jesus, magistrates are civic officers that serve Jesus for our good.

Elders have authority in the church. Why? To benefit the congregation **Heb. 13** says. It’s for the good of the church. Parents have authority over their children as a good thing. **Read 6:1-3**.

When children submit to authority what do they get? Long life; blessed life. News flash: that’s a good thing.

Masters have authority over slaves. So on. We need to stop thinking authority is bad, and that submission to that authority is bad. Wives submitting to their husbands who have authority over them is not a bad thing. It's a good and glorious thing and is a way we show the gospel to people around us.

Feminists will decry this as patriarchy and say that it's evil and oppressive. All we mean when we say patriarchy is father rule. That's literally what the word means. And there is a pattern all through the Bible of men ruling. Men in government, men in battle, men in the church, men in the home. Generally speaking God has designed men to lead in every sphere of life. And specifically, he has designed them to lead in the home.

This isn't a result of the fall. This isn't a result of sin. This is actually how God designed Adam in the Garden before sin to lead his wife, Eve. And it continues to this day.

So this is the command. Wives submit- place yourselves under - the authority of your husbands. What's this mean?

It means that he's your head. He has the final say on matters. Your home is not a democracy. Your home is led by your husband and you should help him to lead your family well.

Now, how does this actually play out in marriage?

First, this doesn't mean husbands ignore their wife's input. That would be foolish. Aside from the Bible, your wife is your greatest asset and you would be foolish not to hear what she has to say - especially on big decisions.

Wives you should be able and willing to give input. Not nag by repeating something over and over. Not arguing. Not manipulating or giving the cold shoulder to get your way.

But you should be able to give input.

Second, Husbands can and should delegate things to their wives. I delegate all grocery shopping to my wife. I delegate most of the home schooling to her. Basically anything that involves a spreadsheet goes to her. That doesn't mean I'm hands off or uninvolved. It just means it's appropriate to delegate. And especially to delegate to her strengths.

I remember when we were moving into an apartment I was talking to the landlord about the details of our lease and she was directing traffic for where boxes were to go and I thought, this is wrong. I could care less about the fine print on the lease, but that's her strong suit. I want to direct traffic. So we traded. It's good to delegate things to your wife's strengths.

Third, submission only happens when there's a disagreement. If you and your husband like hamburgers for dinner, your not submitting. If you and your husband want to paint the living room beige, there's no submission.

Submission is what happens when there's disagreement. I get 2 weeks of vacation, she wants the beach, I want the lake. How do we decide hard things?

There's a movie where a middle class guy is offered a high paying executive job in New York. And he wants to move his family to the city. The wife freaks out - not going to happen. The battle is on and she isn't having it.

The next scene is one of the best depictions of humble submission I've seen in a movie. She's completely calm and humble and says she thought they would grow old in their home and have holidays there and have the grandkids come. But she says if he really needs the job, she'll take the kids and the family and go wherever he wants to go because she loves him. And her love for him is more important than their address."

And it's a beautiful depiction of submission because there's no bitterness, there's no resentment. There's just "I will do the hardest thing you've ever asked me to do because I love you and that's what matters."

Let me just tell you that a husband who has a wife that submits like that - unless he's just a donkey of a man - won't steamroll his wife. He'll probably seriously reconsider the direction he's taking his family. **Turn to 1 Pet. 3:1-6.**

This is another place the Bible talks about the role of wives. And I like this section because it's particularly addressing hard situations. What if a wife has a husband who is an unbeliever? Or what if he's being foolish or unwise - he's not obeying the Word? What then? **Read**

So what if you've got an unbelieving husband or a fool of a husband, what then? Same thing. Be subject to them. What might that achieve? You might actually win them over just by being quiet and respectful.

Sometimes ladies think the only way they can win is to argue and fight and manipulate and give the cold shoulder. None of which is godly.

Peter says, actually you might be able to kill 2 birds with one stone. You'll obey the Lord and maybe even win over your husband by simply being quiet and respectful. **Read 1-2**

Do you see it? There's a chance you could win a husband who is not obeying the Lord not by fighting, but by submitting with a gentle and quiet spirit.

Then Peter talks about what you wear. Christian women aren't to be known for bling and fashion sense. What are they to be known for? **Read 3-4**

If you want to be a gorgeous, beautiful Christian women what you wear is gentleness and quietness. God himself says that that's precious. God says "That's my girl!"

That doesn't mean you can't say anything. It doesn't mean you don't get to have opinions or input. But the general posture of your life is quietness. And respect and love for your husband. **Read 5-6**

So here's the great example of Sarah. She's an example of faithfulness because she obeyed Abraham and called him Lord. The first word - obedient - is usually bristled at by everyone. But obedience is just the obvious outworking of submission.

I had a boss who wanted me to do things I thought were really foolish once. Not sinful, but I thought his idea was dumb. I remember being so upset that it was a total waste of time and money and knew he'd regret it later. So what did I do? I submitted to him. How? By obeying what he told me to do. These two concepts are hand in glove.

So wives, if your husband makes a decision, unless it's sinful, you are to obey him. That's the outworking of submission.

The other thing that is said of Sarah is that she calls Abraham lord. And maybe it seems silly at first glance. I know my wife and I have joked about that. But actually if you know the context of when this happens, what it shows is that Sarah's actions aren't just for show. She genuinely respects and loves Abraham. When does she call him lord? **Turn to Gen. 18.**

I know this is a little bit of a trail. But I think it's instructive. This is when God comes to Abraham and promises Isaac to him. He's waited for decades, now God says it'll happen next year. Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. And it's just God and Abraham talking and Sarah is eavesdropping. **Read 18:1-8**

So Abraham is sitting outside his tent and 3 guys walk up. He realizes they're special - angels and the Lord himself. So he goes inside to have Sarah cook something up. He's outside, she's inside. **Read 9-14**

Now there's a lot to unpack there. But I just want to focus in on the thing that Peter focuses in on. When does Sarah call Abraham lord? It's in **Vs. 12.** She says it to herself. **Read**

What does that mean? It means that even though she's struggling to believe this promise of God, she genuinely respects her husband. She's talking to herself. She's not saying to herself "I'm not going to be intimate with that old fool." "How are me grandpa going to have babies?" She's not thinking that. In her mind, in her heart she reveres her husband as lord.

What's a lord? Someone who has authority over you. Someone who leads you and provides for you. Peter says to wives, be like Sarah to your husbands and love and respect their role of authority.

And I just have ask, ladies, do you view your husband with respect and reverence internally? Or do you despise your husband? Do you think he's a fool or beneath you?

Peter says wives are the children of Sarah if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening, submitting like Sarah calling him lord.

Listen, there's a lot of things a husband could do that are scary and difficult and hard. They are frightening. I've asked my wife to move across the country twice. Move away from family 2 other times. Make large financial investments, buy houses, make decisions about kids, medical decisions. Those are big deals.

Husbands are foolish to think that our leadership can't be frightening sometimes. We have a massive responsibility for every soul in our household.

There are times when following our lead is frightening, or frustrating, or maddening. Maybe it doesn't make sense, it contradicts what we said last time. Our logic is fuzzy and confusing. Or you just simply don't agree.

Maybe it sounds crazy, like at 90 years old Sarah being told she's going to have babies. That's bonkers. Like if some of you retired guys were like "Hey the Mrs and I are thinking about cranking out a few more." I'd be thinking "Well, even if that were possible, I'm not sure that's a really good idea."

What does Sarah do? She obeys and respects Abraham in her heart. Ladies this is your calling and it's precious to God when you do it well. It's not an easy calling, but it's the task you've been given by the Lord.

When you do it well you display the glory of God in the gospel. Just like the church joyfully submits to Christ, ladies joyfully submit to their husbands. That act of submission whether you realize it or not is actually displaying the gospel to you and your husband and children and neighbors and family.

It's good and glorious and pleases the Lord.

Pray