

## What Does Submission Mean?

Ephesians 5:23-29, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*”

I want you women to know at the very off set of this message that I am your friend, and that you are going to love me before this sermon is over.

Women have resisted the concept of the husband’s headship because they believe that headship means dominance and control. Men resist it because they like their freedom from family responsibility.

Just what is Ephesians 5:23-29 talking about and what does God mean by these words?

### “*Submission*” does not mean domination!

We all have heard of brutal attempts to assert this leadership. One man, for instance, when his wife insisted that he stop drinking, said, “*I’m not going to let her ware the pants in this family,*” and beat her so severely that she died. His brutality only showed his weakness. When an argument is weak, says the old adage, shout like fury! If a man’s confidence is in his masculinity is low, he may attempt to elevate it by bullying those who seem to be weaker than he. He is only manifesting how inadequate he is to be a head.

The husband’s leadership is not a domination of his wife, which would merely expose his own insecurity, but rather is a partner-like leadership based upon the respect inherent in *agape* love. We have in the headship of the husband a needed structure to family life, and modern resistance to it has already proved costly. God is not talking in Ephesians 6 about an abusive tyrant who dominates his wife.

### “*Submission*” does not mean discrimination

A woman salary may be lower than that of a man for doing the same work and her chances of promotion in business may be lessened simply because she is a women, but that does not come from God’s Word. God never teaches inequity, prejudice or intolerance f anyone.

Today’s philosophy of “*Playboy*” is nothing more than a sophisticated approach to male chauvinism and domination. The female “*bunny*” is reduced to nothing more than a playmate for the male “*playboy*” She is admired for her beautiful body and enjoyed as an entertaining companion.

This approach to women is patronizing. It places their value in their usefulness for man’s enjoyment and entertainment. They are primarily bodies with a high degree of sex appeal, excluding a great deal of women from even qualifying. The male attitude seems to be that women are wonderful so long as they stay in their place. This is the familiar acceptance pattern

of the prejudiced. Sad to say that many men today feel about “*women, who know their place*” are those who know their inferior position, and as a reward they are indulged, even admired, by their superiors.

### **“*Submission*” does not mean superiority**

Men have taken advantage of their superior *physical* strength to justify their dominance over women. Obviously this is one area in which men as a rule excel. Yet it is a very primitive level of evaluation.

When it comes to intelligence, women are good competitors. Girls more often than not excel boys when it comes to learning. Attempts on the part of some men to ignore the brain power of women shows that perhaps they are threatened by it. The argument that some men use that women should not have the opportunity because they are not up to it, could well be fear that if women are given the opportunity they would be too competitive. When a woman begins to use her intelligence in a serious way, men, very often, become uneasy. They do not wish to take women seriously because they do not wish to disturb their illusion of male superiority.

### **“*Submission*” will not produce resentment**

Usually, it is in her family role that woman has her opportunity to dominate the man. Under the guise of justified resentment, but with a betraying obsessive ness, a woman may repeatedly cause her husband to feel small. His manliness may be already under attack in his competition in the socioeconomic world, and he may have little resistance left when his wife continues to attack from her own vantage point in the home.

### **“*Submission*” is God’s leadership**

Doesn’t the trend today seem to be that, father is being eliminated from family leadership and replaced by mother? Now the mother is being eliminated and the children are replacing her.

Scripture does say, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church*” (Ephesians 5:23).

There are those who like the title of authority but not the responsibility with its tensions and demands. Our ulcer-ridden society emphasizes how frustrating these tensions can be. The fact that men die an average of five years earlier than women mirrors the pressures our society places upon the man. This may be one reason why he avoids assuming his responsibility in the home. His vocational pressures may be preempting most of his energies. Despite this, he is called upon by God to be the head.

Those who see an unjust demand on the women in submitting to her husband’s headship should contemplate what it means for the husband to love his wife **as Christ loved the Church.**

Scripture also teaches, “*Husband love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25).

How did Christ love the Church?

Christ drew her (the Church) to Himself by giving Himself up for her. This is love that provides its own stimulus to give of itself. The Greeks called it “*agape love*.” This self-giving love of Christ is exemplified in His going to the cross. It is this sacrifice gesture that draws the Church to Christ and she responds. So in a limited way it is the self-giving love of the husband that draws the wife to him and she responds.

Husband, never mind whether your wife reverence you or not, you are to love her *as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her!* You are to love, regardless, fulfill your own duty!

The initiative remains with the man. The *agape* love he is to show indicates that he recognizes his wife as a person – something that was quite exceptional for the ancient world.

The apostle’s point is that the husband should love his wife as his own body. This is in keeping with the analogy of the Church as the Body of Christ. The *agape* love that brings healing to the Church brings that same positive potential to the marital union.

The husband’s leadership role in the marriage invests him with responsibility before God for the direction of family living. This is a leadership that his wife in her response helps him to accept. As the Church is in subjection to Christ, so also let the wife be to her own husband. This means she is not to sabotage his leadership or usurp it. The wife’s role is to encourage and strengthen her husband’s leadership rather than eliminate it. Husband and wife are to be marital partners bearing one another’s burdens.

Ephesians 5:21 says, “*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God [or, your reverence for Christ].*”

Instead we often encounter the opposite situation – the other end of the pendulum swing – where the man in the home is ineffective or “*out of it*” altogether. Father is often nothing more than one who seconds the motions. He simply says, “*You heard what you mother said!*” And all the while the woman wishes that the man would assume more of his responsibility in the family.

Samuel Liebowitz, says that every time the mother overrules the father and thus undermines his authority and his standing in the eyes of the children, she undermines the child’s own foundation. He says, “*If mothers would understand that much of their importance lies in building up the father image for the child, they would achieve the deep satisfaction of children who turn out well.*” Perhaps then, he suggests, she would not have to stand before him in juvenile court with tears in her eyes to say those words he hears so often, “*What did I do that was wrong, Judge – what did I do that was wrong.*” On the basis of his long experience the judge offers a nine-word principle for juvenile delinquency – “**Put father back at the head of the family.**”

This demise of male leadership in the home is an unexpected by-product of the movement for feminine equality expressed in woman suffrage. Because they were made to feel inferior to men by discriminatory practices, some women sought equality by being man-like. In so doing they were denying the equality of their own sex.

Genuine equality for woman is the equality of a woman as a woman. The healing of the wounds takes place in the woman’s acceptance of her own unique, indispensable function as a woman. Only then can she be satisfied with equality with men rather than domination over them.