

The Biblical Role of the Wife

A Refresher on the Family

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We're glad that you are here to worship Christ and to hear God's word this morning as we return to the book of Ephesians and we come to a critical passage, really, on practical life for the believer. as we enter into God's teaching from Scripture on marriage, on parenting, on workplace relationships, as Paul brings to bear upon the minds of believers everywhere the practical outworking of the nature of salvation and that's what we're going to see here today.

Last time we stopped at Ephesians 5:21 and I'd invite you to turn to Ephesians 5:21 as we kind of set the stage and reset to get back into the text having been away from Ephesians for a few weeks now. At the end of a long section of teaching, Paul calls believers to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ in Ephesians 5:21, and this principle of submission that is laid out there has the idea of subordination; it has the idea of arranging your life and your attitude under others; it is the verb that is used to describe the submission of soldiers to those with a superior rank. And Paul now, having stated that general principle, is about to take it and apply it to different realms of life. It's the same basic principle but the way that it applies in specific roles in life, the application is a little bit different. It's not simply a blind mutual submission that is the same to everyone everywhere, if that was the case, Paul wouldn't need to go on and explain how to apply it in these different realms, rather he takes it and he shows us what submission means in different areas of life.

Now, as we enter into the teaching on wives, there is something very important for you to understand: authority and submission is woven into God's fabric for life throughout every meaningful area of life. If you think about it, in Romans 13, the Bible calls citizens to submit to the government; the Bible calls workers to submit to their masters; the Scriptures call on the church to submit to church leadership. So again and again and again you see that God has established order; he has established structure with authority that is meant to be submitted to throughout all of life, and as we enter into this teaching on Ephesians 5, we find that it is no different as Paul applies it in the realm of the family.

Paul starts, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by speaking to wives. Look at verses 22 through 24 which will be our text for this morning. Ephesians 5:22-24, it says,

22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

Now, we have a lot of spiritual opportunity here, both within the room and those of you that are watching over the live stream, perhaps the weather kept you away, I'm glad for you to be able to listen in. This text addresses women and that affects my tone as I speak here today. I'm mindful of that. By the way, there is so much that needs to be said about marriage in our culture generally and for those of you that perhaps missed our series on homosexuality, we addressed the idea of marriage and the homosexual movement in a message that I titled "Why is homosexuality wrong?" and you can go to our website and find that for kind of an outworking of cultural application from the principles of marriage and dealing with the times in which we live. Today's focus, rather, is a little bit different. In fact, it's a lot different because here we are talking within the context of the church and Paul is speaking to believers here and so we need to approach it differently.

This is not a political message that we are addressing here. This is to those in the church that are seeking to follow Christ and we have a lot of opportunity, as I said. Some of you ladies are single and you would like to be married. Some of you are married happily, others maybe not quite so much. And still others carry the scars of past divorce or immorality in your life carries forth the consequences of sins that you have committed in the past, or perhaps that others have committed against you. Let me remind you as we begin, something very important as we would consider how Christ would communicate these principles about marriage to you as a woman with a past: no one has been a friend to women like the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus made himself known to the Samaritan woman even though she had had five husbands when he did in John 4. When a woman with a long-standing hemorrhage touched his cloak and was healed, he turned to her and said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace." And when a sinful woman washed his feet with her tears and her hair, he forgave her many sins and said to her, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

So ladies, as we come together today and as I address you from God's word, whether you are content in singleness or marriage, or if men have brought you heartache and led you into sin, perhaps you're here and you've led men into sin and given them heartache, whatever the case may be, take heart as you listen today. Scripture is abundantly clear that Christ is a sympathetic Savior who receives sinful women and gladly forgives them as they come and receive him and put their faith in him. He forgives them and makes them new. Your past does not define your future in Christ, quite to the contrary, Christ is the defining reality that determines the course of your future. So while we study these things and Paul addresses women in a particular way, we need to understand that Christ is mediating his love through his word to you today. Your sinful past does not exclude you from his grace and love. In fact, your sinful past is the very context in which Christ will now show his love to you and he shows his love by giving us a sense of direction through the inspired apostle. He gives us the direction that he would have wives to live in order to live in obedience to him, to glorify him, and to experience his blessing. So, ladies,

remember your Savior. Remember the gracious one who has saved you as we come to this text today, and rest in Christ as you hear his word today.

So with those thoughts in mind, ladies, let's take a look at what submission means for you in the context of marriage, or for those of you that are single, how you should prepare as you contemplate possibly a future of marriage, what that is to look like, what you should be training your heart in even if you are not there. And even for the rest of us, remembering that Paul had just said for all of us to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, we realize that we walk on holy ground here today. This is not the place for a high-spirited, high-handed rebellion that says, "I'm not going to submit to anyone. You know, I'm my own person. I am independent." That's not the spirit that Paul calls us to. He calls us to fear Christ and to bring ourselves into submission to his authority which is going to show us submission in other realms of relationships so that's the spirit in which we look at it here today. You know, we just want to be obedient to Christ today, don't we? That's why we gather together, that's why we hear his word, that's how we respond to a gracious Savior who laid his life down for us, we respond with a willing compliance with whatever it is that he has to say to us. And so we approach this passage with a teachable spirit just like we do every other passage of Scripture. We say, "Lord, speak. Lord, teach us. Lord, lead us through your word that we might be found pleasing to you."

So with that spirit, we examine four principles about a wife's submission to her husband that Scripture would teach us in order to experience the blessing of marriage. What can we say about this? The first principle today is very basic, is that this submission, this is the first point: this submission is to the husband. This submission is to the husband. Paul here is telling wives how the general principle of submission in chapter 5, verse 21, applies to you, and he focuses on the heart attitudes of yieldedness and self-renunciation.

Look at verse 22, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Those of you that are looking at a NASB, perhaps other versions, see the words "be subject" in italics indicating that those words are not present in the original text. As you read through the text, it says, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord." It's just a carryover from verse 21. Our English translators have supplied the verb, "be subject," in verse 22 simply to give a sense of clarity as it brings a new paragraph to bear.

But here's what I want you to see and there is so much confusion and misdirection and mischaracterization about the Bible's teaching on submission in marriage that we need to be very basic and clear on what it is saying. Paul is not calling on Christian women to submit to all men generally everywhere. That is not his point at all. Read the text carefully. He says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." It's very directed. It's very specific. He speaks to the women in the congregation and he says, "Those of you that are married, you are to be in submission to your husband as you go through life, as you live in the Christian life in the context of marriage." Ladies, you single ladies, watch this, you young people, it's very good for you to hear these things even as a young teenager to understand something very important here: this passage is not, whatever else we say about courtship and dating and all of that, we're not going to

get into that here today, I just want to say this, this passage does not call on an unmarried girl to submit to the boy with whom she has a relationship. A Christian girlfriend is not under an obligation and should not consider herself as being in submission to a Christian boyfriend. That's not the case. You should not think in those terms. It is marriage that imposes this duty, not a mere social relationship that may come or go.

So you need to be very careful about that and be very careful to think through what you're doing in a relationship and realize that this submission of which Paul speaks is a wife to a husband, and if you're not married to that man yet, don't think in those terms. That can only distort the relationship, it can only put wrong pressures on it, it can only lead you astray. And those of you who are unmarried men in the audience, you should not think about the girl in your life in those terms as well as if you own her and she owes you submission. Not until you put that ring on her finger and you pledge your loyalty to her in a public setting. Not until then should you ever expect that from a girl. Your point to her is, "You're in submission to the Lord and we'll see what he does with our relationship going forward."

No, wives are being addressed here and so we need that to be clear. It's wives being in submission to their husband, not single people being addressed here, not women generally to men in society. This is a very narrow and focused submission that Paul calls women to here and it's an entire heart attitude that he wants them to cultivate. Ladies, those of you that are married, those of you that are contemplating marriage, those of you that are looking for a woman to be married, you should see this disposition there or do I see somebody who's just marked by rebellion in her life. Well, you know, these things all flow out of a character. What Paul is saying here is he wants wives to show yieldedness to their husbands as the ongoing pattern of their lives. It's an entire heart attitude that he wants them to cultivate that would be the dynamic that is the mark of daily life.

Notice that he speaks it in general terms, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Notice that at the end of verse 24, he wraps it up and he makes it comprehensive when he says, "wives ought to be to their husbands in everything." So there is this attitude of submission, of yieldedness, of conscious joyful subordination to your husband that Scripture calls you to. And ladies, this is not something that you give to your husband grudgingly. It is not something that you give to him when you feel like he deserves it and you reserve the right to be the judge of that. No, Christ has already been the judge of when this is appropriate and Christ calls wives to be subject to their husbands even as they are to the Lord. This is the man that God has given to you for better or for worse as you probably vowed at your wedding. This is the man that God has given to you and in his providence you understand and you look at that and say, "Okay, this is the sphere in which I live out practical obedience to Christ is in the way that I submit and the way that I respond to my husband." This is just the word of God in plain unvarnished form.

Now, has this verse been abused? Sure it has. Almost every verse in the Bible has been abused in one manner or another. And husbands, it seems like, particularly professing Christian husbands, like to look at this passage and make it a demand on the wives that

they institute and they say, "Woman, submit to me," and they make it a matter of lording it over the woman and reminding her of these things and requiring different things from her. Well, men, I want you to notice something really important here and with men, I'll speak to you with a different tone than I do to the ladies: you men need to understand that this command is written to the wives. It is not written to husbands. This is not given to husbands as that which you would use to enforce submission on your wife. That is a total distortion of the spirit of the passage. Listen, Paul will get to you soon enough in verses 25 to 33. If you're really concerned as a man to be a godly man and a godly husband, your focus goes to 25 through 33 and say, "How does this address me?" rather than bypassing your own obedience to Christ in order to manipulate and lord it over your wife and say, "You see what Scripture says, you are to submit to me." Well, you let God work that out in the heart of your wife, you focus on verses 25-33. Paul will get to you soon enough. We'll address you next week.

For now, understand that Paul, look at this, this is just simple biblical interpretation; it's amazing the simplicity of biblical understanding. Look at verse 22, "Wives." It's evocative; he's addressing them directly. He says, "Wives," and so you as a husband say, "Oh, he's talking to the wives now. Maybe I should step back and maybe just put my hand over my lips and be quiet as he addresses the wives in what he has to say." But, ladies, with that corrective issue to some of the men perhaps in the congregation or those of you watching over the internet, married ladies, you need to implement this. This is not me speaking. This is the word of God that is laying this out and saying this is how God wants a Christian woman to live in her marriage.

You single ladies, I've got several of them in my family, you single ladies, you need to be careful as you approach marriage, as you contemplate marriage just speaking to you as a pastor. Once you choose your man, this principle applies whether he is good to you or not and so be careful. Don't rush into marriage because the lifelong consequences of being in submission to a selfish, domineering man are very broad and deep indeed. And to quote an unmarried friend of mine who is now in his 70s, it may be better for you to want something you don't have than to have someone that you don't want. Be mindful of that. There are worse things than going through life unmarried and one of those worse things is being married to a selfish, abusive man and being in a position where Scripture tells you that you're to live in submission to him. Don't make life unnecessarily difficult simply because you're in a hurry to try to get out of a situation of loneliness that you don't like. And if you happen to be single and you're content there, God bless you. Scripture speaks about that as well. But as we're addressing what the Scriptures say about the wives' submission to their husbands, understand that principle 1 is that this submission is to the husband, not to all men generally, not to a boyfriend, not to anything like that. Focus on the married aspect of this and you'll do well.

Now, what can we say secondly as a second principle about this? Well, this is where the spiritual opportunity really comes into play. Point 2 as we contemplate this: is that this submission is to the Lord himself. This submission is to the Lord. It is the Lord Jesus who calls you to this standard of submission. In some ways, ladies, you look beyond your husband and what I am sure is his most imperfect manifestation of Christ to you, you

look beyond that and see who it is that is calling you to this life of submission, and the wife must see that it is the Lord himself who commands it, not her husband.

Look at chapter 5, verse 22 where it says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." A Christian wife, let's just state this plainly, a Christian wife cannot rebel against her husband without simultaneously rebelling against the Lord. God is the one who established the husband's authority in the home. He has given the duty of submission to the wife. So what you must understand as you go through marriage and as you contemplate the application of this, ladies, is that your response on this matter is not up to your personal preference. God commands it. This is God's word. This is God saying, "Wives, be subject your husband," and he gives a parallel, "you submit to your husband as you would submit to the Lord himself." So it's not a matter of preference.

Let me give you an illustration to help you understand how this comes together. My wife has relatives who have an old-fashioned rope making machine, and it's an interesting thing to see. It kind of stands on two different ends and you put different strands of twine together and then you start twisting the lever and it gradually wraps those twines around one another and you turn the crank repeatedly so that those strands become a single rope. There are three strands but when you're done, you can't see where one begins and the other one ends; they're just wound together so tightly like that, and when it's finished, you've got one rope even though it started with separate strands. Well, wives, ladies, your submission to your husband is so tied up with your obedience to the Lord that you really can't separate the two. You can't be a defiant wife toward your husband and consider yourself to be a woman who is living in obedience to the Lord. It doesn't work that way. An obedient Christian wife is going to be marked by a godly submissive attitude to her husband. That's what it says here in verse 5:22.

Look at it with me again. "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." They go together. Look at verse 24 which reemphasizes it even more but says, "But as the church is subject to Christ." He draws the parallel of the way the church responds to the Lord in a corporate way. Well, he says in just that manner, that is how wives are to respond to their husbands. Verse 24, "so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything." So Scripture has laid this out and, ladies, what you need to see is that this is not conditioned on the character of your husband. It is conditioned on the nature of the Lord; the nature of Scripture. You cannot separate the two out and isolate that part of your life and say, "I'll do it my way here." That's not what the Lordship of Christ was ever meant to be in anyone's life where we would pick and choose that which we thought was acceptable.

So, ladies, here's a hard statement maybe but it's very true: your godliness starts with the man that you married. Your godliness starts with how you respond to your husband. It's great for us to come and be happy together in this room but it doesn't do much good and it doesn't mean much if somehow you're a different person inside the home than you are where everybody else can see. So I realize, I realize that this is searching; it's a penetrating concept of all and that's why I'm very careful about the tone with which I speak. Some of you men don't necessarily deserve the kind of godly response that your

wife gives to you but, ladies, notice, you have to realize that this starts with the Lord. This is coming from Christ himself and that is what, by the way, that is what gives you the motivation and that's what gives you the comfort and the encouragement you need to respond to a difficult husband is you realize, "You know, I'm not doing this for him on a horizontal level anyway. I'm doing this in response to the Lord. This is what he has called me to. Do you know what? He calls some to go out and they bear witness to Christ and they suffer persecution, imprisonment. Many have given their necks for the sake of Christ and they gladly did that. Well, my role, my position," you say to yourself, "is just a little bit different. I give myself in a godly way to a difficult relationship and I gladly do that because this is what the Lord, who shed his blood for me, calls me to do. And if I can't do it for the man in front of me, I can certainly do it for the Christ on the throne who calls me to it." So this submission is to your husband. This is a submission that is to the Lord because he is the one who commands it.

Now, let's go to a third point in our text this morning: this submission is based on authority. This submission is based on authority. Look at verse 23 with me. Paul says that "the husband is the head of the wife," verse 23. "For," there you go, you see what premise, the basis of this command to be subject to your own husbands. Why should you be subject to your own husbands? For, because, here is the reason that undergirds that authority and Paul says, verse 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." The head refers to the place of authority, not simply source but authority. We talk about the head of a corporation, the head of a department, when we say that, we understand that whoever the head of that company is, he's the one that's in charge, he has the decision-making authority and Paul is using it in a similar way here. Ladies, men as well, some of you need to hear that you need to step up to your leadership role, you need to step up to your spiritual authority in the home. I get that and we'll talk about that more next week, but all of us need to be mindful that God has given to the husband the position of leadership in the marriage and he wants you as a wife to line up under that authority and not to rebel against it.

And notice that he says, verse 23, and when you see it's a striking parallel that he makes, isn't it? It is a bold parallel. I can tell you that personally speaking, if this were not in the Scriptures, I would not make this parallel because it is so stark and it is such a holy comparison that he makes. He says, "the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church." Christ has authority over the church because he bought it with his blood. Paul says, "In a similar manner, the husband has authority over the wife that is to be respected and known and understood." And just as we in the church understand the authority of Christ and we come into submission to his Lordship, we recognize his authority, what he says is what we do, and we do that not only out of external obedience but from the heart affection that honors his authority, that respects it, that gives honor to it in the church to Christ. Paul says, "There's the parallel. That's the analogy in which you should think about the relationship between a wife and her husband." Just as the church acts and lives under Christ's authority, so also a wife does under the authority of her husband and she is meant to defer to it, to respect it, to honor it.

Now, ladies, I realize that this cuts against the grain. It swims upstream against everything that the sewage of cultural media lays out before us. This is in direct opposition to what you're conditioned to think in any other place except in Scripture, but you need to remember that Scripture is your authority, that Christ is your authority, that Christ has the defining voice and the way that you think, the way that you respond, the way that you shape your affections, and the way that you live your lives. Ladies, you don't take your cues from what the latest woman's guru says or from Oprah or from "The View," that despicable flow of sewage that comes out. That's not your cue; that's not your defining direction in life. Scripture is, Christ is, and when you come to the purity, the clean water of Scripture, you see plainly what it says.

And here's what that means for you and we need to think through this; we need to let this set in: this is not a statement of a wife's inferiority to her husband. It has nothing to do with inferiority or superiority at all. It's all about God assigned roles. And ladies, if you have been created in the image of God, there is a dignity in your very existence simply by being a member of the human race. God has bestowed great dignity upon you by creating you in his image. If he's gone further and he has redeemed you by the blood of Christ, he has reconciled you to his own holy self through the blood of his Son and now you are a privileged and welcome person in his presence, you can enter into the presence of God and make your wants and wishes known, and you belong to Christ and you are joined to Christ, and he will bring you into heaven when it's all said and done, and he will be with you and is with you know throughout the trials and the mountain tops and the valleys of life, well, there's a whole other dignity laid upon you, to belong to Christ as a blood bought child of his. There is no inferiority here. God has done nothing but bestow dignity upon you as a Christian woman; dignity as created in his image; dignity as the object of the saving blood of Christ, and that dignity isn't set aside when God calls you to live in this way in response to your husband. It has nothing to do with inferiority or God treating women poorly or anything like that, any of the other distortions that the world would throw against this. This is what God has called women to do for a proper functioning of a marriage and even more, to display what the relationship between Christ and the church looks like. The church loves Christ, respects him, reveres him, submits to him. Ladies, your marriage is supposed to be an illustration and example of what that looks like on an individual scale. So you have the privilege as a Christian woman, you have the privilege as a Christian woman to display what the church looks like in response to Christ. That's a privilege, not a diminishment. That's an honor, not inferiority.

So as we think about how the church responds to Christ, it's obvious what this means to wives in the marriage relationship. The wife is not to act independently of her husband or contrary to his wishes. When their desires conflict, it is up to the wife to defer and we'll say a little bit more about that in just a moment, but that is to be the defining mindset in the context of your marriage. "God has given this man as the authority in my life. I am to defer, to line up under him and to live in submission to him." Even to this point, even to this point, my wife has lived this out beautifully, by the way, just so you know. I'm very blessed. It's easy for me to speak on this part of Ephesians 5 because of the way that Nancy has lived in response to me. The harder part is going to be preaching the next passage that comes next week when it applies to me and perhaps the level of conformity

hasn't been all that it could be. But even down to this point: my wife loves dogs and I don't. You know, for some of you, you can say amen. Some of you maybe question what kind of man I am. "You don't like dogs? What's the matter with you?" And all of that. We had a dog for a while that lived for several years and it died and I didn't want any more dogs. Nancy would still like to have a dog but she respects my position enough to say, "If you don't want a dog, we won't have a dog," and not make an issue of it; not to fight about it; not to argue about it; not to badger me about it. Just say, "Okay," and she's told our kids and she's told some of you also. You know, this is the way that you live in response to what your husband says. That's what you do.

Well, that makes for harmony. Can you imagine how miserable our marriage would be if I held tight on the dog thing and she held tight to saying, "No, I want one," and we're just colliding over that? Well, God gives this order. God gives this structure to a marriage so that peace would be produced in what comes from it, and whether you think I'm being unreasonable or not is really beside the point. It's about the way that a marriage is supposed to function. And some of my kids hear this and say, "Uh, he's still not going to change his mind." That's right, I'm not. But that's how this works out and what I want you to see is that what God has established is that which produces peace and harmony in a home, and like I say, we get to the husbands next week.

Well, what's the final thing that we can say? The fourth point here is that this submission is comprehensive. We've said that this submission is to the husband; this submission is to the Lord; this submission is based on authority; finally, this submission is comprehensive. And we've already said this but it bears repeating again as we go through the text: the wife cannot pick and choose where she will submit. To say, "I'll choose where I will submit," is simply another way of saying, "I'm still in charge here. I wear the pants in this family and I'll decide where I'll submit. You will wear the pants in the family because I say that you do." That's not it. That's not the right perspective. That's not the right way to think about it.

Look at verse 24 with me, "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything." Paul makes it very broad. He makes it comprehensive. This is a comprehensive response to your husband, ladies. Look, there is a reason why I framed it with the tone that I did at the start. I realize this can be a challenge, especially if you're married to a knucklehead. Waiting to see if anybody nods or anything like that. No one did. That was smart on your part. It's not limited to when you think your husband is right, and even if you're sure that he's mistaken, you should not rebel against him. We know that because Paul compares it to the church's subjection to Christ. We submit because of his authority. Sometimes things happen in your life and you're not sure what God is doing, well, that doesn't give you suddenly a license to rebel and to sin against God, does it, simply because you don't understand this particular manifestation of his providence? Of course not. Well, you say, "I don't understand. This is hard, but I still live in submission to Christ as I go through." Well, in a similar manner, ladies, you adopt that mindset toward your husband and you submit to his authority. Yes, your husband may show poor judgment. He probably has often, but that doesn't change the submission that you're called to.

Look over at 1 Peter 3 as we let Scripture continue to help us understand other passages of Scripture. 1 Peter 3, let's look at the first four verses here of 1 Peter. It's not just Paul and women, it's Peter and women as well. Chapter 3, verse 1, he says, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior." Ladies, won without a word as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Verse 3, "Your adornment must not be merely external - braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." Ladies, I know that some of you, at least some Christian women that I have known in the past, take it upon themselves to try to be the enforcer of their husband's sanctification and they delight in pointing out their husband's faults, calling him to account on things that he has done wrong, and creating conflict and confronting him in the ways that he has fallen short. That's not what Scripture describes here, is it? Some of you ladies need to realize you need a tighter regulator on your mouth when it comes to relating to your husband because Peter's instruction here is that they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. You just graciously deal with your husband in a loving, forgiving way and trust God to work on his heart and not try to always be creating conflict and confrontation because your husband doesn't add up to what you want him to be. That is not a godly response. That is not what Scripture calls you to.

Now, let me clarify a couple of important things here lest I be misunderstood, and we're going to have some practical applications of this in just a moment, and let me just be very, very clear on what we're saying here: this teaching about submission in a comprehensive way, this does not exclude the wife from discussions about family life or about decisions that are being made. That would be foolish and that's not the idea. Husbands, submission does not mean that you seal your wife's lips from ever saying anything about anything and that she just does exactly whatever you deem to be right. That's not it. There is a proper place for discussion; a proper place for appeal that says, "Honey, can we talk about this? Have you considered this? Could you think about it from this perspective?" It is appropriate for a wife to speak that way. It is appropriate for her to address her husband and, men, you should receive that with all earnestness and seriousness and sympathy as she does. You're not a warden and your wife is not a prisoner and so let's not treat them that way. I say without hesitation to all of you men in this room: a smart husband listens to his wife and listens to her contribution and her perspective because a lot of times she's going to have more insight on things than you do. But, ladies, there does come a point where the husband says a decision has been made, when that's done, then you follow your husband and you accept that happily, gladly, joyfully.

And let me just say one other thing. I can't be up here with my wife in the audience and not just say a couple of things. You know, one of the things that I have really appreciated about Nancy is the way that she has lived this out in this "without a word" kind of thing. There have been multiple times where I have behaved badly, I've said something sharply,

I've done things, I've made decisions hastily or whatever, and Nancy's consistent pattern of life has been is that she doesn't make a big contention out of that. You know, and that has a more sanctifying influence on me than if she confronted me at every point of turn. You know, men, you kind of know when, if you're a Christian man, you know when you've messed up, when you've said something, and ladies, when you just quietly say nothing about it, that has more of a convicting force than your angry confrontation ever could. What goes through your husband's conscience is, "Wow, you know, she could have really nailed me on that and she just graciously let it pass over and didn't say a word," and you realize that the way that she's responding is out of godliness and that godliness from a wife has a sanctifying influence, as Peter says, without a word being said to the husband. Ladies, believe in the Holy Spirit. Believe in the Holy Spirit and let the Spirit of God have an influence on your husband and be patient. Maybe, just maybe, your husband's failures are part of what God is using to sanctify you as well; to teach you to be submissive; to trust; to endure patiently perhaps when you're spoken to or treated wrongly. Well, I can speak to these things from experience because I have had the blessing of seeing it lived out before me in my own household from my own wife, and I know the influence that it's had on me and still has on me.

Now, let me say something else about the comprehensiveness of this submission. We've said that it is in everything, but it doesn't shut the wife up into prison where she can't say anything or express an opinion. It's not like that. Let me say something else: this principle of submission does not require the wife to accept physical abuse on her or on her children. Period. This is not a license for a husband to act wickedly and to beat or abuse his family with impunity, without having consequences to go. And just so you know, I'm sure that I don't need to say this to any of the men in here, but just so you know what our position is as a church if this ever comes up as life goes on: if a wife comes to us and tells us and we verify it through investigation that a husband has been beating her, has been abusing his family physically with his fists or in other ways, our advice to the wife is going to be: call the cops and have him arrested. And when she does, she will have our support because that is such a total abuse of the marriage relationship and God has established the governing authorities to protect us from evil people; to protect us from those who are conducting criminal activity inside their homes. So there will not be, this principle of submission will never be used in this church to tell a wife to endure physical abuse in silence.

And men, I want you all to know, I want the fear of God to be inside you on this and for you to extend it to others as well, that if this would ever come up and that there has been a pattern of this in your lives, I want you to know exactly how our church is going to deal with it because that's what we will do. There will be legal consequences. If you abuse your God-given authority and repeatedly abuse your wife, there will be consequences to it. Submission does not mean the husband has a license to commit assault. That's just the way it is. We don't believe that that honors God's word to let a picture of Christ in the church be so distorted by a wicked man. So that's it. I just want to lay that out there so that that's part of the life and understood in the life of our church going forward. We've never had to deal with that here in our church. I had to deal with it at times in past churches, but here in our church we've never had that. I'm not addressing a known issue

when I say these things. We're just dealing with things going forward so that there's clarity and understanding and that you women can feel secure that if there's ever a problem like that with your husbands, that the church will stand beside you and support you in it.

Now, how can we apply all of this in a positive perspective? Kind of dealt with a nasty little issue there but I felt it was important to make that application. How can we apply this today? How can you ladies take this and apply it in a positive way going forward? Well, notice something interesting as you go back to Ephesians 5, go back to Ephesians 5 here, and it says, "the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything." What does that look like? What does the church's response to Christ look like and how can we help apply this in marriage? I'm going to give you five points very quickly, five points of application all drawn from Ephesians 5, all drawn from Ephesians 5. As you see Paul calling the church to respond to Christ, it seems to me that if he's going to make that analogy, well, where would we look in the context to see what the wife's response to her husband would look like and just base this on Scripture rather than on anecdotal stories or something like that.

What can we say that the wife should do? What does this submission look like? First of all, ladies, love him. Love him. Look at Ephesians 5:2, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Paul says to the church, "Walk in love in response to the love of Christ." Well, ladies, isn't it obvious that your love to your husband ought to be one of the applications that you make in this? Sacrifice for him. Show him affection. Affirm him verbally. Show love. You don't need to be taught in that. Scripture says that the Spirit of God teaches you how to love, well, just take that and apply it in your marriage relationship.

Secondly, please him. Please him, Ephesians 5:10. And in contrast to the negative that we were saying earlier about contention and confronting every little fault and all of that, don't be like that we said, well, here's a counterpart, a positive counterpart to that. Please him. Look at Ephesians 5:8, we'll start there for context, "you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)." He's talking to the church saying, "Here's what I want you to do as believers in response to Christ." What does he say in verse 10? "Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." The aspect, as believers we are called to please the Lord. Paul says, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as the church does to Christ." Well then obviously somehow that means that wives, part of your submission is to please him; to do that which satisfies him; which makes him happy. You please him in your conduct. You please him in the kitchen. You please him in the bedroom. You please him with your appearance. You know your man. What is it that makes him happy? What does he respond well to? Do that as part of your submission to him and even if you think he's not quite worthy of it, remember, "Oh yeah, the Lord is the one who calls me to do this."

Thirdly, understand him. Understand him. Look at Ephesians 5:17, Paul again speaking to the church says, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." So understand your husband. Listen to him. Be patient with him. Don't provoke him.

So you love him, you please him, you understand him, fourthly, you could say to praise him. Look at Ephesians 5:19, as the church is responding to Christ what do they do? "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Giving this joyful affirmation to Christ and then in the immediate context, he says, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as the church does to Christ," well, that loving, affirming response that we as believers give to Christ, ladies, there you go for your husbands. Some of you may have to strain to find the things that are worth praising but you do it anyway. You affirm him. You verbalize your support to him generously. Let him know that you believe in him, you affirm him, you're confident in him, you appreciate him.

And finally, we could say, so we said love him, please him, understand him, praise him, maybe we can tie them all up in this final point, 5: respect him. Respect your husband. Verse 21, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Drop down to verse 33, "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband." Ladies, seek his counsel, seek his opinion, and maybe this is one of the most crucial ways that you could apply it above all: support your husband in front of others. Affirm and support and do not contradict your husband in front of your children. Don't do it in front of other ladies whether your husband is present or not. You be found as a woman who speaks well of her husband and if there's not much good that you can say at a particular point in time, that's all right, just don't go into that critical realm. Your children and your friends and people in the church should not hear you speaking critically and harshly about your husband. That is not respectful. It is not appropriate. And the place where if you need help in a marriage relationship, there are older ladies in the church, Titus 2. There may be times where you need help but you go and you look for that and you say, "I'm having this struggle with my husband. Help me get through this in a way that is constructive," rather than turning a negative tongue on your husband and lashing him in front of others. That's inconsistent with respect. We would never speak that way about Christ and so in the same way, ladies, you need to respect your husband and watch your tongue in how you speak to him and how you speak about him.

A wife who does these things will do her part for a good marriage and can rest assured and confident that she will receive an abundant reward from her Lord in responding rightly in this way. Ladies, if you have failed, if you have fallen short in this maybe this week or maybe over the course of life, let me just encourage you to confess your sins earnestly to Christ and make it right where you can and trust that Christ will deal with you graciously, that his blood cleanses you even from the things that you failed at in what we've discussed here today, and rest in his grace going forward knowing that our Lord is gracious and means well for you in the end. Men, better go easy on your wives as you go out today because we get to you next time.

Let's pray together.

Father, marriage is such a source of blessing and yet it can be such a source of heartache. You know those things all too well. And we've talked about difficult things in some ways, and yet we've set aspirations that would help us frame our lives. Father, I pray that you would bless the women in our midst. I pray for those unmarried women who would long to have a godly husband in their lives. I pray that you would comfort them and meet the desires of their heart according to your perfect will. Father, for the ladies that are walking well and are practicing this, I pray that you would affirm them and let them have a sense of encouragement from your word going forward. And if your word is convicted in specifics or just in general, Father, I pray that you would be swift to meet those that are convicted with your grace, with your mercy, with your kindness, with a sense of cleansing as sin is responded to in an appropriate way. And Father, I pray for the men as we contemplate next week hearing from your word on what you say to husbands. Give us grace so that we might respond rightly and ever be men who are a blessing to live with in this kind of way, Father, not to be grouchy, demanding, unkind, unfeeling, uncaring but, Father, rather to thank our Christ for the wife that you have given to us and to love them as Christ himself loved the church. Bless our marriages within this fellowship, Father, and help us to live out that which would point people to the nature of Christ and the church. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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