



The Marriage Relationship

According to the Bible (Ephesians & Colossians)



“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (*Colossians 3:18-19, NIV*).

1. *Read Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-25. When you hear these verses, what comes to mind? How do marriage relationships in your home culture relate to these ideas?*
2. *According to Ephesians 5:22-24, why are wives supposed to submit to their husbands? Assuming this instruction is universal (i.e., applying to all times and cultures), why might this be difficult to accept?*

Wives are supposed to submit because the husband is the “head” (κεφαλη) of the wife. In this context, the meaning of “head” is the one who has authority and is the leader. As traditionally understood, since the headship of the husband is according to God’s original design in creation (*Genesis 2:7, 18, 22-24; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9, 11-12*), it applies to all times and all cultures.

This may be difficult to accept for various reasons, including the following:

- People tend to equate difference in role with difference in value or importance. But this is not true! See Galatians 3:26-29. The Bible clearly says that Christ is coequal with God, because he is God! However, Christ (God the Son) submitted to God the Father. He also submitted to parental authority (*Luke 2:51*). What is more important in holding a car together – the nuts or the bolts? Freedom and fulfillment come from fitting one’s role, not demanding someone else’s.
 - People tend to be self-seeking. We are not content to submit, especially to other fallen human beings. This is a problem for both women and men.
 - Some husbands are lousy leaders. This is sad, but too often true. Of course, the wife should never follow the husband into disobedience to God. On the other hand, consider 1 Peter 3:1-2.
3. *Husbands are commanded to love their wives (Eph 5:25f.; Col 3:19). How are husbands to love their wives? What does this say about the husband’s “headship” or “leadership?”*



Husbands are to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Such a love is a self-giving love (personal and sacrificial) and its concern is to benefit the other (it is “for her”). Love is not merely a feeling. It is a choice that involves the husband’s active and unceasing care for his wife’s well being. In contrast, Paul says, “do not be harsh” with your wives (Colossians 3:19). The husband’s leadership should not be negative, oppressive, or reactionary. Colossians 3:8-14 tells Christians to put off anger and put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. This is how we must treat one another, especially our own wives!

This type of “headship” or “leadership” is called “servant-leadership.” Remember what Jesus said. “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45).

4. *In what ways can the husband fulfill his biblical role in the marriage relationship? What does the husband need to understand about his wife? What makes a good spiritual leader?*

Love. The husband is to love his wife sacrificially and unconditionally. Of course, this is the comprehensive characteristic. But the husband needs to express that love in simple daily life.

- What husbands need to know: How to express that love.
 - Consider her “love language” – Encouraging words; Acts of service; Gift giving; Quality time; Physical touch & closeness. You can determine her “love language” by observing how she expresses love.



Nurture, Build-up. The husband is to encourage and enable her growth. As Christ loves, feeds, and cares for the church, “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies” by nourishing and cherishing her (*Ephesians 5:28-29*).

- What husbands need to know: her values, gifts, abilities, dreams, aspirations

Provide, Protect. The husband is to provide for her material, physical, intellectual, and emotional needs.

- What husbands need to know: What are her needs?
 - The husband cannot assume he automatically understands her needs. Men and women are different! Communication is essential!

Lead. The husband is to lead by example. He is to lead in humility. He is to recognize his responsibility before God to lead his family in spiritual growth for the purpose of God’s glory.

5. *In what ways can the wife fulfill her biblical role in the marriage relationship? What is the purpose of the wife’s submission? Do you think this submission grants her dignity (honor, esteem)? Why or why not?*

Love. Love him sacrificially and unconditionally.

Support.

- Purposes of the wife’s submission:
 - To complete. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (*Genesis 2:18*). For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh (*Eph 5:31; Gen 2:24*). God intends the wife to complement her husband so that together they fulfill God’s expectations more completely than either could separately.

❑ To honor. The wife is to use her gifts and abilities to make the glory of God's image most evident in her spouse and home. The wife should ask, "Do my actions, words, and attitudes support my husband so as to enable him to lead my family to a better knowledge of God?" The ideal wife of Proverbs 31 engages in a great range of domestic, charitable, and business activities. However, the Bible commends such a woman, not because of her industry alone but because of the support and respect she brings her husband through her endeavors (*Proverbs 31:11-12, 23, 28*).

❑ Respect. Ephesians 5:33 says, "each one of you must love his wife, as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" Men typically do not get into extramarital affairs with women because they are more beautiful or sophisticated than their wives, but because they make them feel important, cherished, competent – that is, respected. Staying interested in his career, rejoicing in his successes, cheerleading his ambitions, listening to his dreams, honoring his decisions, admiring his physical appearance, overlooking flaws in each of these areas is important (*Each for the Other*, Bryan Chapell).



What if the husband is a lousy spiritual leader? What if he is not a Christian?

1 Peter 3:1-2 says, "Wives, in the same way (see 2:18-25) be submissive to your husbands so that, even if any of them do not believe (are disobedient to) the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence (toward God) of your lives."

Do you think this submission grants her dignity (honor, esteem)? Why or why not?

What determines personal worth and dignity? The world determines our worth according to our power and influence and personal achievements. But lasting dignity comes from God and is according to his grace. Our personal worth and dignity is realized when we are faithful to God's designs that accomplish His eternal purposes.

6. *What is the common denominator in both the husband's and wife's roles in marriage? How can the husband and wife make the changes that are necessary?*

The common denominator is a self-giving, sacrificial, unconditional love; submission to the best interests of others; and lives that are dedicated to God's service for the purpose of His glory.

How can the husband and wife make the changes that are necessary?

To care for others more than we do for ourselves is counter to our nature. It is impossible to do the things the Bible asks us to do! That is, it is impossible apart from the grace of God. Think of the sacrificial love of God - "even while we were still sinners (totally undeserving!), Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). If we have received Christ through faith, we are new creations! And the Holy Spirit indwells us and empowers us. Only as we put off the old, and rely upon the power of God to transform us, will we be able to love the way we should love in a marriage relationship.



Reflection/Application

- If you are not married but hope to marry in the future, what are your expectations concerning marriage? What type of guidelines do you think would best serve your marriage? Since God instituted marriage, he should know how marriage is supposed to work! If you desire a truly fulfilling marriage, listen to God! Of course, fulfilling marriages involve fulfilled people, and the Bible claims that true fulfillment is found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

- If you are a Christian who is planning to get married, are you committed to building your marriage on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ? Are you committed to unconditionally loving your spouse with a self-giving attitude? Are you committed to living out your marriage according to biblical principles? Have you dedicated yourself and your marriage to God's service? Are you really prepared for marriage? Before you get married, seek premarital Christian counseling. Work through a marriage preparation manual like *Before You Say "I Do"* by Norman Wright.

- If you are married, have you truly dedicated yourself and your marriage to God's service? Are you fulfilling your role in the marriage relationship? Identify specific attitudes that need to change. Identify specific actions that need to be implemented. Set aside time to communicate with your spouse concerning your marriage relationship, and humbly listen. Read a good book on Christian marriage. Attend a Christian marriage conference. Apply what you learn, relying on the Holy Spirit to transform you and your marriage.

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