

Submission and Sacrifice I – *Ephesians 5:22-24*

Introduction – As we return to Ephesians, we must consider these next practical application passages in light of the overall context (Eph 5:17ff). We must comprehend what God has done for us, which occurs when we are filled by the Holy Spirit which is always accompanied with music, thanksgiving, and mutual deference. Especially when it comes to the relationships in families, it is only possible to fulfill our duties as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit; it is impossible apart from such overflow. And especially when it comes to the roles of wives and husbands, the practical cannot be obeyed without acknowledging and embracing the doctrine embedded in the practical. This is acknowledged by Paul in vv32-33.

Unpacking Some of the Words and Phrases – This is particularly necessary to do today because we live in a culture that has wholeheartedly twisted and/or abandoned these commands.

Submission, as to the Lord (v22) – The word submission means *"to put in subjection under."* The command is given by the Lord to the wife and not by the husband to the wife. She is to place herself in subjection under her husband's headship, neither because he says so nor because he has earned it, but because the Lord has commanded it. This is made clearer by the fact that a woman is to submit herself to her own husband and not to any other man. She is to do this *"as to the Lord"* and you could compare this with those who visit, feed, and clothe the poor with Jesus' teaching, *"inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"* (Matt 25:40). When she renders godly, Spirit-filled submission to her husband, she is doing it unto her heavenly Father.

The Headship Reason (v23) – The wife is to render submission because of the covenant structure of the marriage relationship. This headship is tied to a relationship of union and communion, of mutual indwelling, and not to a hierarchical flowchart. There is no sense of qualitative superiority to the wife any more than there is between the Son and the Father (1 Cor 11:3) and so our Savior teaches us what biblical submission looks like. Christ always spoke about Himself and the Father being one, and that everything He did and said was from the Father's initiation. In theological terms, this is the difference between ontological and economical relations; the equality of the Father and the Son as well as the subordination of the Son to the Father. Both husband and wife need to study and understand these important distinctions.

Submit to him in everything (v24) – The test of submission is not when a wife is likeminded with her husband but when it wouldn't be her choice. *"Everything"* is not absolute, for the wife is not under her husband in any absolute sense but only in the Lord.

What Does This Allow and Forbid? – Paul (nor any other person who joyfully submits to the scripture) is no misogynist and no defender of husbands being jerks. Taken with all scripture as a whole, this sister in the Lord is forbidden from hiding gross sins of her husband from his and their other authorities. It allows her freedom to inquire of her elders, and in some cases an older woman who may be a mentor, when she is confused, suspicious, or threatened. Her husband is to teach her by his example of living out the Word what it means to submit to imperfect authorities. How did we end up talking about the husband? Well, she is to submit to him, for he is her head, *"as Christ is the head of the church, the Savior of the body."* And how was He Savior of the body? By being a Man, overflowing with the Spirit, in glad submission to His head, the Father (Phil 2:5-7). I have never seen a couple where the wife was grossly undermining her husband's authority while he was and had been pouring on the Christ-like, sacrificial love.

Two Words of Caution, One Reminder, and a Helpful Picture –

The Cautions – First, there is no indication that a wife's submission is to be based on the degree to which her husband demonstrates his love; his disobedience is never an excuse for her sin. Second, her submission is to be of her own accord in obedience to the Lord, not by the demand of her husband.

The Reminder – It only takes a few minutes discussing vv22-24 and folks forget vv17-21. Apart from the work of the Spirit, this standard for marriage is impossible. Wives are to submit to their husbands out of the overflow of the Spirit's work. If you just grit your teeth and bear it, you are only a fine Muslim wife. But we are not Unitarians, which leads to the picture...

The Dance of Trinitarian Submission – As Douglas Wilson puts it, in a Unitarian world, authority and submission is a fist fight with a winner and a loser, someone on top and someone beat down. In a Trinitarian world, authority and submission are a lovely dance. Press this metaphor out a bit. Both dancers are submitting to the music around them. He submits to the music, sacrificing for her by leading her, supporting her, and glorifying her in the dance. As she submits to his lead (and not to any other dancer on the floor), she follows his lead with her right, completing his steps and glorifying his moves. She must choose carefully to say 'yes' to a dancer who will lead her rightly, and she looks foolish if she keeps stopping in the middle of the dance questioning his next move – she must follow him in everything. But once again, we must end with the husband: how in the world do you expect her to follow you when you are such a lousy dancer, or when you refuse to follow the music? Yes, the Lord has commanded her to submit to you; and you must make it a delight to do so.