

# Ephesians 5:21-22 Commentary

PREVIOUS

EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH  
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Ephesians 5:21 and be [subject](#) to [one another](#) in the [fear](#) of [Christ](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [hupotassomenoi](#) (PPMPN) [allelois en phobo Christou](#).

**Amplified:** Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). [Amplified Bible - Lockman](#)

**NLT:** And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

**Phillips:** And "fit in with" each other, because of your common reverence for Christ. [Phillips: Touchstone](#)

**Wuest:** putting yourselves in subjection to one another in the fear of Christ.

**Young's Literal:** subjecting yourselves to one another in the fear of God.

#### AND BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER: [hupotassomenoi](#) (PPMPN) [allelois](#):

- Eph 5:22,24; Ge 16:9; 1Chr 29:24; Ro 13:1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 1Co 16:16; Php 2:3; 1Ti 2:11; 1Ti 3:4; Heb 13:17; 1Pe 2:13; 5:5
- Ephesians Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to One Another](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 5:22-24 What! Me, Submit to Him?](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 5:20-21: Be Filled with the Spirit-4](#) - John MacArthur
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**And** - Note that this verse clearly ties the truth about submission to the instructions on being filled with the Spirit. Paul is teaching that if one is filled with the Spirit, he or she will willingly submit themselves to whatever authority God has placed over them. The corollary truth is that genuine submission from the heart is not possible apart from the Spirit's empowering. Finally, in this verse it is clear that there is to be a mutual submission between believers apart from the line of authority.

#### John Phillips...

The key to each relationship is submission, the kind of submission the Son yielded to the Father when He lived on earth as a man. That kind of submission, so often contrary to human nature, is an evidence of the filling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will drill us in submission by the pressure of human relationships. It may take time, but eventually we learn that the path of submission is best; we learn to fall in line with the will of the Holy Spirit.

All of life and society should swing around the pole of obedience to divinely ordained authority. Sin entered the world through one man's disobedience; our salvation was wrought through another's obedience unto death, "even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8-note).

Looking back over the section of the Epistle that concludes with Ephesians 5:21, we see that yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit is the key to all our moral relationships. Looking ahead to the sections following Ephesians 5:21, we see that yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit is also the key to all marital relationships and to all material relationships. ([Phillips, John: Exploring Ephesians: An Expository Commentary](#))

**Ironside** - The Spirit-filled believer, then, is characterized by these three things, joyfulness, thankfulness, lowliness. May God give to each one of us to be filled with the Spirit. ([Ironside's Notes](#))

**Be subject to one another** - This instruction to maintain an orderly arrangement was based on the fact the foundational truth that these were Spirit filled believers, which Paul goes on to discuss in three groups, husbands and wives (Eph 5:21-33), parents and children (Eph 6:1,2,3, 4-note), and masters and servants (Eph 6:5, 6, 7, 8, 9-note). The primary underlying truth in each of these groups is recognition that they are to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. This submission does not preclude submission of wives to husbands, children to parents, or slaves to masters, as all are necessary to maintain an orderly arrangement in society. A basic principle of submission on every level is not asking whether we can trust the one we are submitting to but whether we can trust God to work through the leader?

Remember that Paul's charge to the saints in Ephesians 4 was that they should be

"diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". (Ep 4:3-note)

Here in Ephesians 5 Paul's instructions to Spirit filled husbands and wives to be arranged in an orderly manner toward one another would serve to facilitate the preservation of the unity of the body of Christ. By nature, we want to promote ourselves, but the Holy Spirit enables us to submit ourselves.

**Lawrence Richards** explains that...

**Submit** (be subject) is a complex concept which needs to be defined by the context in which it is used. Here there is no question of power or of position, as we find in Ro 13. Here Paul calls for all believers to develop an attitude of submission, a willingness to be responsive and to yield to one another out of love. It is wrong to read hierarchy into this verse or into the passage which follows. Rather, we see the development of a sensitivity to others that frees us from pride and enables us to act at all times in loving, caring ways. (Bible Reader's Companion)

**Be subject** (5293) (**hupotasso** [word study] from **hupó** = under + **tasso** = arrange in orderly manner) means literally to place under in an orderly fashion. In the active voice **hupotasso** means to subject, bring under firm control, subordinate as used in (Ro 8:20-note)

**H C G Moule** - The primary point in the Gospel is humiliation; self is dethroned as against God, and consequently as against men. Here the special, but not exclusive, reference is to fellow-Christians. "[The precept] seems to have been suggested by the humble and loving spirit which is the moving principle of thanksgiving." [Ellicott] Special applications of this great principle now follow, in a study of the relative duties of the Christian Home.

**Hupotásso** means to submit (to yield to governance or authority), to place in subjection. It is important to note that many of the NT uses are in the **passive voice** with a **middle voice** which signifies the **voluntary subjection** of oneself to the will of another. Husbands and wives both need to understand the **voluntary** nature of the submission called for in the marital relationship lest it be misapplied.

**Hupotásso** was a military term meaning that troop divisions were to be arranged in a military fashion under the command of the leader. In this state of subordination they were now subject to the orders of their commander. Thus, it speaks of the subjection of one individual under another. **Hupotasso** was also used to describe the arrangement of military implements on a battlefield in order that one might carry out effective warfare!

**Be subject** (hupotasso) is in the **present tense** (continual action called for) and the **middle voice** (reflexive) which calls for the subject to **initiate** and then **participate** in the action of putting one's self in subjection to or under the authority of another. In this context the middle voice stresses the voluntary or willing nature of their submission. The reflexive sense of the middle voice could be translated "**submit yourselves**" (it's in the plural in this verse) or more paraphrased in context as "**place yourselves in order under the authority of**" another.

In other words, Spirit filled believers are to **continually voluntarily place themselves in under** the authority of each other. Stated another way, Spirit filled believers are the only ones who truly have the supernatural desire and power to submit! They are to submit to each other not necessarily because the spouse is personally merits the submission, but because by submitting to them they were obeying God's Word and thus honoring God.

Paul writes that God the Father

**put** all things in **subjection** (hupotasso) under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (Ep 1:22, 23-note)

This is a quote from **Psalm 8:6** indicating that God has exalted Christ and granted Him universal dominion, over His body the church, over men and angels and over all the rest of His creation, animate and inanimate. Christ is clearly the authoritative Head because all things have been placed under His feet.

In **First Corinthians** Paul elaborates on the order of God to man and man to woman writing...

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (1Cor 11:3)

**How is it possible to submit or surrender one's rights to another?** Paul gives us the answer In Ephesians writing that believers should

"not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled** with (controlled by) the Spirit" (Ep 5:18-note).

**Henry Alford** says: "As we are otherwise to be filled, otherwise to sing and rejoice, so also we are otherwise to behave—not

blustering nor letting our voices rise in selfish vaunting, as such men do,—but **subject to one another.**" ([Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary](#))

Subjecting one's self to another is **the opposite of self assertion**, the **opposite of an independent, autocratic spirit**. It is the desire to get along with one another, being satisfied with less than one's due, a sweet reasonableness of attitude.

Paul then goes on to give instructions that

Wives, [**be subject**] (not in the Greek but implied by the context) to your **own** (one's own private, peculiar, unique possession) husbands, **as** (*hōs* = adverb of comparison = even as, in the same manner as, like as) to the Lord (to Christ; not to the husband as lord and master = the obedience she has to render to her husband is as an obedience rendered to Christ). (Eph 5:22).

The Greek is literally

"The wives to their own husbands as to the Lord." Then Paul adds "as the church is **subject** (*hupotasso*) to Christ, so also the wives [ought to] (not in the Greek but added by translators) be to their husbands in everything." (Eph 5:24-note) (For more in depth discussion of this topic click Wayne Barber's messages on "**Spirit-Filled Families**")

**Wayne Barber** notes that here in the context of marriage **hupotasso** "does not mean that (the wife) is commanded to obey her husband as a child would obey his parents or a slave would obey his master. A lot of men treat their wives as if they are a door mat. They walk all over them as if they have no sense, as if they have no ability, as if they are inferiors. That is not what (*hupotasso*) means."

**Dr. Barber** goes on to explain that **hupotasso**, the word used for wives to husbands, is the word that talks about two people who are absolutely equal in God's eyes, totally equal. There is not one level of inferiority of one to the other. But the wife makes a choice to place herself as an equal underneath another equal, her husband, in order that there can be order and function in the family. The whole purpose of it is so that it meets the design that God has already ordered... Does it mean that your wife is a slave to obey your every command? Does it mean that you treat her like a child? NO! If there is a man who thinks for one second that they have any superiority in God's eyes over their wife, they are gravely mistaken from God's Word. However, by His design to have a functional family, concessions have to be made. So God says, "Wives, you make it and you choose to put yourself underneath the headship of your husband" in order that the design can be what God says it ought to be. The meaning of it has nothing to do with inferior to superior. It takes nothing from the dignity of a woman for her to submit, but rather it enhances it. It takes great integrity for a person to do what God says should be done. (excerpt from "Spirit-Filled Families")

In all of these verses in Ephesians 5, submission represents an act of faith. We are trusting God to direct in our lives and to work out His purposes in His time. After all, there is a danger in submitting to others - they might take advantage of us—but not if we trust God and if we are submitted to one another! A person who is truly yielded to God, and who wants to serve his fellow Christian, would not even think of taking advantage of someone else, saved or unsaved. The husband who **demand**s his wife's submission to him but does not recognize **his own obligation to submit to her** and thus distorts God's standard for the marriage relationship and cannot rightly function as a godly husband. Parents who demand obedience from their children but do not recognize their own obligation to submit in loving sacrifice to meet their children's needs are themselves disobedient to their heavenly Father and cannot rightly function as godly parents. To reiterate, biblical submission is ONLY possible in those who are filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

**Ray Stedman** comments that **submit** "has become the focus of the feminist movement and is probably one of the most hated words among women today. The meaning has been grossly distorted. Many wrongs things have been done in the name of submission. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said about submission is that it does not cancel out equality. Although it is addressed here to wives, it is not a female word in the Bible but is addressed to men as well. Thus it is not a sexist word. Everyone must submit to other people. In Ep 5:21, Paul says Christians are to submit "one to another." The outstanding manifestation of true submission, of course, is seen in our Lord's submitting of Himself to the Father (and as [noted above](#) as a young boy to His parents!). No one would ever conceive of the idea that Jesus found it a reproach to submit to the Father. He delighted in it. It was voluntary on his part. In no way did he regard it as a threat to the equality which he knew existed between himself and the Father. Therefore, to submit to someone does not mean you are not equal. This is the confusing meaning which the world has poured into this word. Submission does not mean inequality. Literally, it means "**put yourself under, arrange yourself under someone, for a good and proper purpose.**" **It is a totally voluntary action.**" ([See complete sermon "Living Christianly"](#))

**One another** ([240](#)) (**allelon**) means each other and speaks of a mutuality or sharing of sentiments between two persons or groups of persons. **Allelon** is a reciprocal pronoun which denotes that the encouragement and edification is to be a mutual beneficial activity. As each one submits, encourages, loves, etc the other member, they both benefit. This is the God's description and

prescription for a healthy marriage.

**One another** is a common NT phrase (especially in Paul's letters) with most uses relating to **the building up of the body of Christ**. As such the "**one anothers**" in the NT would make an excellent Sunday School study (or topical sermon series or small group study), taking time to meditate on each occurrence, asking whether it is being practiced (in the Spirit-note) in your local church and seeking to excel still more (cp Php 1:9, 10, 11 -notes; 1Th 3:12-note, 1Th 4:1-note, 1Th 4:10-note). Below is a list of the NT uses of **one another** (be sure to check the context [which you can do by clicking the links below] for the most accurate interpretation). As an aside, note that many of these "one another's" are issued as commands and not suggestions!

## THE ONE ANOTHERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### The Positive

><> Ro 12:10-note, Ro 12:16-note; Ro 13:8-note; Ro 14:13-note, Ro 14:19-note;  
Ro 15:5-note, Ro 15:7-note, Ro 15:14-note; Ro 16:16-note  
><> 1Co 12:25; 1Co 16:20; 2Co 13:12  
><> Ga 5:13; Ep 4:2-note, Ep 4:25-note, Ep 4:32-note; Ep 5:19-note, Ep 5:21-note  
><> Php 2:3-note; Col 3:13-note, Col 3:16-note  
><> 1Th 3:12-note; 1Th 4:9-note, 1Th 4:18-note; 1Th 5:11-note, 1Th 5:13-note, 1Th 5:15-note; 2Th 1:3  
><> Heb 3:13-note; He 10:24, 25-note  
><> Jas 5:16, 1Pe 1:22-note; 1Pe 4:8, 9-note, 1Pe 4:10-note; 1Pe 5:5-note, 1Pe 5:14-note  
><> 1Jn 1:7,3:11,23,4:7,11, 12, 2Jn 1:5

### The Negative

<>< 1Co 6:7, 7:5, 11:33, Ga 5:15, Ga 5:26-note Col 3:9-note, Jas 4:11, 5:9

## IN THE FEAR OF CHRIST: en phobo Christou:

- 2Chr 19:7; Neh 5:9,15; Pr 24:21; 2 Co 7:1-note; 1Pe 2:17-note
- Ephesians Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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2 Chronicles 19:7 "Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe."

Nehemiah 5:9 Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

Nehemiah 5:15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.

2Corinthians 7:1 (note) Therefore, having these promises (see 2Co 6:16, 17, 18), beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (The "sphere" or

"atmosphere" in which the glorious flower of holiness grows best is in the soil fed by a holy awe of the Holy One of Israel. **Beloved, how does your garden grow?**).

**Fear of Christ** - Is really a reverential awe of and respect for His Lordship and Headship (and add the certainty of the truth of 1Co 3:13, 14, 15, 2Co 5:10, cf Paul's behavior in light of this truth in 2Co 5:9!). This principle of mutual submission based upon shared reverence for Christ as Lord is (in context Ep 5:18, 19, 20) one of three evidences of the **Spirit-filled life** and in context is critical to maintain harmony and order not just in the **marriage** between husbands and wives but in the **family** between children and fathers and in the **workplace** between slave and master. The theme of mutual submission addressed how these Gentile believers were to deal with authority in the main social institutions. Paul's position was that **Spirit filled believers** could be in submission to one another even though the prevalent social customs expected submission **only** of women, children, and slaves. **Christianity radically altered the social order of the ancient world, turning it right side up!**

The **fear of the Lord** is a good thing. A right reverence for our Lord will motivate right conduct (Job 1:1, 8, Ps 112:1 [note](#), Ps 119:168-[note](#), Pr 8:13). Peter speaking to believers emphasizes the vital importance of a healthy fear of God writing...

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, **conduct** (aorist imperative) yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth (1Pe 1:17-note)

**John Eadie**... comments that this speaks of "reverential submission to Christ. (Acts 9:31; 2Co 5:11, 7:1; 1Pe 3:2). **Phobos** here is not terror or slavish apprehension, but that solemn awe which the authority of Christ inspires. In this the mutual deference and submission commanded by the apostle must have their seat. This Christian virtue is not cringing obsequiousness; and while it stands opposed to rude and dictatorial insolence, and to that selfish preference for our own opinion and position which amounts to a claim of infallibility, it is not inconsistent with that honest independence of disposition and sentiment which every rational and responsible being must exercise. It lays the foundation also, as is seen in the following context, for the discharge of relative duty, as in the three instances of wives, children, and servants, nor is it without room for exhibition in the case of husbands, parents, and masters; in short, it should be seen to develop itself in all the relations of domestic life. ([Ephesians 5 Commentary](#))

**Ray Stedman** has the following thoughts on this verse in his devotional entitled **The Cure For Conflict**...

In saying this, the apostle is dealing with the basic remedy for all the conflicts in our day. Paul will apply this principle as he discusses the relationship of husbands to wives, which brings in the whole realm of marriage and divorce and the problems that arise there. Then he will take up the matter of children and parents, which brings in the whole issue of juvenile delinquency, causes and what can be done about it. Then he will take up the issue of management and labor. In each case, the remedy is always the same: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

If we have any desire at all to be part of a solution to the issues surrounding us today, we must do so out of an understanding of what God has revealed about the heart of the problem. We must go back to the cause of all human strife. There is no one who has not at some time asked the question, "How can I get the greatest satisfaction out of life? How can I get the maximum expression of my potential? How can I fulfill myself?" It is not wrong to ask these questions because God has put these urges within us, but it is gravely wrong to ask them in this way.

When we ask the questions this way, we are asking as though we were the only person in the world, as though we were responsible for our own self-development. Sooner or later, in my attempts to develop myself and to gain satisfaction, I find myself on a collision course with someone else who is attempting the same thing. I find that my efforts to satisfy myself are continually sabotaged by others who are trying to achieve satisfaction in the same way. I insist on my rights, and others insist on their rights, and so we become obstacles to each other.

But Paul changes the whole pattern for Christians by introducing two radical factors that alter the whole situation. First, the Christian must never forget that in every relationship of life, another person is present: It is not merely a problem of what I want versus what you want. In every relationship, the apostle reminds us, a third Person is present--the Lord Jesus Christ.

That brings us to the second matter. When I am at odds with another person, to see that Christ is there too is to make me aware immediately of what He has taught me. It is only when I forget myself and devote myself to another's fulfillment that I will find my own heart running over with grace and satisfaction. This is one of the fundamental mysteries of life, and it is confirmed to us every day. Those who try desperately to satisfy themselves are the ones who end up hollow inside. Our Lord put it this way: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

It becomes, then, a question of priority. You cannot have your rights by insisting upon them. You can have them only when you seek to give others their rights. Do you dare to try this radical principle right where you live?

Father; I thank You for a word that searches me and cuts deep and lays bare and hides nothing. I know that in this sweet surgery of Holy Spirit there is healing, forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration. ([Ephesians 5:21 The Cure For Conflict](#))

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**Submissive Leadership** - A mild-mannered man was reading a book on being self-assertive and decided to start at home. So he stormed into his house, pointed a finger in his wife's face, and said, "From now on I'm boss around here and my word is law! I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal and draw my bath. Then, when I've eaten and finished my bath, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair." "The mortician," replied his wife.

King Rehoboam tried that kind of self-assertiveness and it turned Israel against him. When he came to the throne, the people pleaded for less oppressive taxation. His older advisors urged him to heed their request, but his young friends told him to be even more demanding than his father. As a result of listening to his peers, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel seceded and formed a new kingdom (2Chr 10:16, 17).

Good leaders don't rely on domineering self-assertion—not at home, nor in church, nor in business. Rather, they balance self-assertiveness (which isn't wrong in itself) with the principle of submitting to one another (Ep 5:21). They listen respectfully, admit when they're wrong, show a willingness to change, and mix gentleness with firmness. That's submissive leadership—and it works!—Herbert Vander Lugt

Submissive leadership requires  
A kind and gentle honesty  
That will attend to others' needs  
And win their love and loyalty. —D. De Haan

**The only leaders qualified to lead  
are those who have learned to serve.**

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Ephesians 5:22 [Wives](#), *be subject to your own husbands*, as to the [Lord](#). (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [Ai gunaikēs tois idiois andrasin os to kurio.](#)

**Amplified:** Wives, be subject (be submissive and adapt yourselves) to your own husbands as [a service] to the Lord. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** You wives must learn to adapt yourselves to your husbands, as you submit yourselves to the Lord, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** The wives, be putting yourselves in subjection with implicit obedience to your own husbands as to the Lord,

**Young's Literal:** The wives! to your own husbands subject yourselves, as to the Lord,

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**WIVES, BE SUBJECT TO YOUR OWN HUSBANDS: Ai gunaikēs tois idiois andrasin:**

- Eph 5:24; Ge 3:16; Esther 1:16, 17, 18,20; 1 Cor 14:34; Col 3:18-25; 1 Ti 2:11,12; Titus 2:5; 1 Pe 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- Ephesians Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to One Another](#) - Steven Cole
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The Phillips paraphrase ("You wives must learn to adapt yourselves") is an unfortunate attempt to make this verse more palatable. In **Colossians** Paul clearly issues this same instruction as a command...

Wives, **be subject** (present imperative - calls for this attitude to be the Spirit filled wife's lifestyle) to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (Col 3:18-note)

**John Phillips** - This verse, taken out of context, has caused many husbands to repress their wives and many wives to be resentful and rebellious. Standing alone, this verse seems arbitrary and unfair. But it does not stand alone. No verse of Scripture stands alone. This verse is preceded by the command that we submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God. What a pity that preachers so often ignore this context when beginning a series of messages on husband-wife relationships. The context includes not only the Holy Spirit's instruction for mutual submission, but also His teaching about the Holy Spirit's infilling—the blessed oil that makes the machinery of marriage run smoothly. (Ibid)

Paul now discusses **marriage** which he uses as a picture of the church, the mystery of Jews and Gentiles in one Body, the Bride of Christ. The secret of harmony in the home is two Spirit filled believers! Warren Wiersbe adds that...

The unity of the church (Ep 4:3-note) and the harmony of the home both depend on the Spirit. It is power from within, not pressure from without, that holds the church and the home together. ([Wiersbe, W. W. Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books](#))

**Wives be subject** - The verb **hupotasso** [**word study**] is not present in the Greek text used to translate the NAS (in the NAS words in italics are added by the translators. **Hupotasso** is present in the Textus Receptus used for the KJV) but is clearly to be assumed when one compares this sentence with the preceding sentence (and Ephesians 5:24-note) that describes submission. The spiritual dynamic that operates in a Spirit filled wife is that when she submits to her Lord, she will have no difficulty submitting to her husband. This verse does not say that the wife is inferior in any way to her husband, not does it say that she is to be his slave, for as stated in verse 21, the husband is also to submit to the Lord. It follows that if both Spirit filled spouses are voluntarily submitting to the Lord, their will be a oneness, a unity and a harmony in the marital relationship. As an aside, one can clearly see why a believer is clearly prohibited from marrying a non-believing spouse (2Cor 6:14, 15, 16, 17, 18).

**John Eadie** has an intriguing thought writing that...

With regard to the following admonition ("wives... to your own husbands") it is to be borne in mind, that in those days wives, when converted and elevated from comparative servitude, might be tempted, in the novel consciousness of freedom, to encroach a little—as if to put to the test the extent of their recent liberty and enlargement. The case was also no uncommon one for Christian wives to have unbelieving husbands, and the wife might imagine that there was for her an opportunity to manifest the superiority of a new and happy creed. 1Pet. 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. And those Ephesian wives had little of the literary and none of the religious education enjoyed by the daughters of modern Christian households. Even under the Mosaic law, women and wives had few legal rights, and they too, when baptized, needed the injunction of the apostle... The duty of submission is plainly based on that tenderness, speciality, or exclusiveness of relationship which **idios** (your own) implies. But that submission is not servitude, for the wife is not a mere vassal. ([Ephesians 5 Commentary](#))

**Wayne Barber** emphasizes what the verb **hupotasso** **does not mean** stating...

Sometimes when you see what it does not mean, it helps see what it does mean. For instance, **hupotasso** does not mean that the wife is commanded to obey her husband as a child would obey his parents or a slave would obey his master. Many men treat their wives like door mats and they "walk all over them" as if they have no sense or ability and as if they are inferior. That is not what the **hupotasso** means. As a matter of fact, there is another Greek word that is used in that kind of relationship. It is the word **hupakouo** (see related noun **hupakoe**) which is entirely different.

**Hupotasso** describes two people who are absolutely equal in God's eyes. There is no inferiority of one to the other. The wife makes a choice to place herself as an equal underneath another equal, her husband, in order that there can be order and function in the family. The whole purpose of it is so that it meets the design that God has ordered... It takes nothing from the dignity of a woman for her to submit, but rather it enhances it. It takes great integrity for a person to do what God says should be done.

**Hupotasso** It says nothing about their ability. Maybe the wife is full of personality, full of character, full of all



kinds of ability. It is the exact reverse of what you think the model ought to be. God says, "Wives, I don't care how much intelligence you have. I don't care how many spiritual gifts you have. I don't care how much energy you have. I don't care how much better you look than your husband. Wives, submit to your husbands." "But God, my husband is a bully! God, you don't want me submitting to my husband, do you?" God said, "That's right. You submit to your husband."

## WOMEN IN THREE CULTURES: JEWISH, GREEK, ROMAN

It is important to understand the cultural context in which Paul (and Peter see below) was calling for wives to submit to their own husbands. In the first century, there were 3 converging cultures, Jewish, Greek and Roman, and in each culture, women had no rights or at most minimal rights.

In the **Jewish culture** a woman was treated not as a person but as a thing; and was owned by her husband in exactly the same way as he owned his sheep and his goats. She was absolutely her husband's possession to do with as he willed. On no account could the wife leave the husband, although he could dismiss her at any moment. The more liberal Rabbis, headed by the Hillel interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1 to say that a man might divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in his food, if she walked in public with her head uncovered, if she talked with men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband's parents in her husband's hearing, if she was a brawling woman, if she was troublesome or quarrelsome! For a wife to change her religion while her husband did not was unthinkable. The Jews had a low view of women as evidenced by their morning prayer in which a Jewish man gave thanks that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman." The Jewish woman had no legal rights whatsoever.

In the **Greek culture** the duty of the woman was "to remain indoors and to be obedient to her husband." It was the sign of a good woman that she must see as little, hear as little and ask as little as possible. She had no kind of independent existence and no kind of mind of her own, and her husband could divorce her almost at caprice, so long as he returned her dowry. It is fascinating to read some of the lofty ideals regarding marriage in the classic Greek literature (stress on monogamous marriage, Plato's promotion of equality in various offices, etc) and yet observe the obvious disconnect of these ideals from the frank reality of a culture that had a popular pun that if a woman runs a house it dies!

**William Barclay**, whose commentaries often provide a wonderful source for cultural and historical context, adds these notes concerning women in the Greek culture...

Prostitution was an essential part of Greek life. Demosthenes had laid it down as the accepted rule of life:

"We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs."

The woman of the respectable classes in Greece led a completely secluded life. She took no part in public life; she never appeared on the streets alone; she never even appeared at meals or at social occasions; she had her own apartments and none but her husband might enter into them. It was the aim that, as Xenophon had it,

"she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."

The Greek respectable woman was brought up in such a way that companionship and fellowship in marriage was impossible. Socrates said:

"Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife—and is there anyone to whom you talk less?"

Versus was the imperial colleague of the great Marcus Aurelius. He was blamed by his wife for associating with other women, and his answer was that she must remember that the name of *wife* was a title of dignity but not of pleasure. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere.

To make matters worse, there was no legal procedure of divorce in Greece. As someone has put it, divorce was by nothing else than caprice. The one security that the wife had was that her dowry must be returned. Home and family life were near to being extinct and fidelity was completely non-existent. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible](#))

In the **Roman culture**, the law provided no rights for a woman. In law she remained forever a child. When she was under her father she was under the Roman law of **patria potestas**, the father's power, which gave the father the right even of life and death over her; and when she married she passed equally into the power of her husband. She was entirely subject to her husband and completely at his mercy. Cato the Censor, the typical ancient Roman, wrote

"If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial."

Roman matrons were prohibited from drinking wine, and Egnatius beat his wife to death when he found her doing so. Sulpicius Gallus dismissed his wife because she had once appeared in the streets without a veil. Antistius Vetus divorced his wife because he saw her secretly speaking to a freed woman in public. Publius Sempronius Sophus divorced his wife because once she went to the public games. The whole attitude of ancient civilization was that no woman could dare take any decision for herself.

**Barclay** adds his insights on the role of women in the Roman culture noting that...

In Rome the matter was still worse; its degeneracy was tragic. For the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic there had been not one single case of divorce. The first recorded divorce was that of Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 B. C. But at the time of Paul, Roman family life was wrecked. Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. In Rome the Romans did not commonly date their years by numbers; they called them by the names of the consuls; Seneca says that women dated the years by the names of their husbands. Martial tells of a woman who had had ten husbands; Juvenal tells of one who had had eight husbands in five years; Jerome declares it to be true that in Rome there was a woman who was married to her twenty-third husband and she herself was his twenty-first wife. We find a Roman Emperor Augustus demanding that her husband should divorce the lady Livia when she was with child that he might himself marry her. We find even Cicero, in his old age, putting away his wife Terentia that he might marry a young heiress, whose trustee he was, that he might enter into her estate in order to pay his debts.

That is not to say that there was no such thing as fidelity. Suetonius tells of a Roman lady called Mallonia who committed suicide rather than submit to the favours of Tiberius the Emperor. But it is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere was adulterous. The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown. ([Ibid](#))

In the context of family relationships, it is notable that the wife is not called to **submit** not to **obey** (see word study hupakouo) her husband, as children are to obey their parents and slaves their masters. In other words, a husband is to treat his wife as an equal and not as his servant or as if she were a child. The husband is not to order the wife about, calling on her to respond to his every wish and command. A wife is not a slave, awaiting commands such as: "Do this! Get that! Fix me that!, etc, etc. That is not what submission means.

**Wives... to your own husbands** - Believer's Study Bible notes that...

In Greek "**wives**" is in the vocative case, yet with the definite article. Used in a general sense, it binds all wives into one class for this assignment. ([Criswell, W A. Believer's Study Bible: New King James Version. 1991. Thomas Nelson](#))

**Peter** also emphasizes the role of the **wife in submission** writing that...

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, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3 And let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 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. (Comment: Peter is not calling for a spineless submission but, as someone has put it, a "voluntary selflessness." It is the submission which is based on the death of pride and the desire to serve. It is the submission not of fear but of perfect love.)

**SUBMISSION  
BUT NOT  
INFERIORITY  
NOR INEQUALITY**

That **submission** does not imply **inferiORITY** is made clear by Paul in First Corinthians...

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (1Cor 11:3)

So even in the Godhead, wherein there is equality, we see that Christ is subordinate to His Father and in the same way wives are subordinate to their husbands. The man is not superior to the woman, as the Father is not superior to Christ, for they are of the same essence. However, as there is divine order in the relative functions of the three persons of the Trinity, so it is fitting for God to ordain a divine order in the functions of the family (husband, wife, children). God established this pattern in the very beginning when Adam was first formed, then Eve, Paul recording that

it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:13)

Genesis also emphasizes the spiritual equality of man and woman Moses recording that...

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27) (**Comment:** Men and women equally share in the spiritual attributes not shared by animals. The text is very specific in defining this equality, which resides in their spiritual being, for that is what it means to be "in the image of God.")

This spiritual equality is emphasized in the New Testament by Paul who writes...

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is **neither male nor female**; for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26-29) (**Comment:** Paul is clearly addressing the family of believers and setting forth in this context the spiritual equality of all who are one "in" Christ Jesus.)

**Believer's Study Bible** writes that "This equality in personhood and difference in function is beautifully illustrated by the Godhead. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equal (John 10:30; 14:9), and yet in function the Son submits to the Father (John 5:19, 20; 6:38; 8:28, 29, 54; 1Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11), and the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father to testify of and glorify the Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14). Thus, the divinely defined relationship between husband and wife is analogous to the relationship within the Godhead, and the relationship within the Godhead is a pattern of instruction for the family unit. ([Criswell, W. A. Believer's Study Bible: New King James Version. 1991. Thomas Nelson](#))

**Morris** adds that equality in personhood and distinction in function "is not an invention of the supposedly anti-feminist apostle, as some have alleged but the stipulation of God Himself, even before the entrance of sin and the curse into the world. This in no way means that man is superior to woman in God's sight, for both were created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), and both are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Each, however, was created for a distinctive role and purpose, and neither is truly fulfilled apart from that. ([Defenders Study Bible](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** has a pithy statement regarding Christian homes writing that "The poet William Cowper called the home "the only bliss of Paradise that hast surviv'd the Fall," but too many homes are an outpost of hell instead of a parcel of paradise. ([Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Wives (1135)** (*gune/gyne* - gives us our word "**gynecology**" - branch of medicine dealing with health care for women) in context of Spirit filled, this designation refers to all believing wives. As one ponders the word **gyne** and **gynecology**, in a sense all husbands should be "*spiritual gynecologists*" (where **-ology** means the study of). In other words all husbands would do well to study their wives that they might practice good "preventive" medicine in their marriage!

**Own (2398)** (**idios**) means belong to one in a private sense, in contrast to public property. Husbands, you belong to your wife! Too many husbands live their lives, especially their work lives, as if they belonged to the public! And then they wonder why their wife feels a bit estranged!!! Note also that the Greek word "idios" does not mean "idiot", which is how some wives treat their husbands (and is how some husbands deserve to be treated!)

**Husbands (435)**(**aner**) refers first to the male sex and in the marital context to the husband.

## AS TO THE LORD: os to kurio:

- Eph 6:5; Colossians 3:22,23
- Ephesians Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to One Another](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 5:22-24 What! Me. Submit to Him?](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 5:20-21: Be Filled with the Spirit-4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:20-21: Be Filled with the Spirit-4 Study Guide \(see dropdown menu\)](#) - John MacArthur

- [Ephesians 5:18-22: A Plan For Your Family God's vs the World's - Part 1](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:18-22, 25; 6:1-2 A Plan for Your Family: God's vs. the World's - Part 2](#)- John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: God's Pattern for Wives-1](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: God's Pattern for Wives-2](#) - John MacArthur

**As to the Lord** - "As" is a term of comparison (**simile**) which raises this instruction to as Phillips says to "a higher, holier, and more heavenly plane. What woman in all the world who has met and fallen in love with Jesus would not willingly do anything for Him? Never in the Gospels do we find a woman treating Him badly, speaking against Him, or doing anything to harm Him. The women of the New Testament loved and honored Jesus. He was so manly, so honorable, so attractive, so thoughtful, and so kind. It is the men in the Gospels who opposed Him, not the women."

And thus the order of submission is critical. (First) A wife's submission to Christ her Lord should motivate this Spirit filled wife to be willing to submit to the headship of her husband (which is aided if the husband is Spirit filled!). Family members who are right with the Lord will be right with each other.

This clause also protects the wife so that her submission "**as to the Lord**" is within the bounds of what is in the will of the Lord.

**Lord** ([2962](#)) (**kurios**) signifies sovereign power and absolute authority. He is the one Who has absolute ownership and uncontested power.

**Wayne Barber** comments on the phrase **as to the Lord**...

Now what in the world would make a woman who is equal, probably more gifted, probably more educated than her husband, put herself under submission to him? Well, look at the verse: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, **as to the Lord**." I have had people ask me, "You mean to tell me I am to treat my husband as I treat the Lord? Is that what he is saying there?" No, he is not saying that. A lot of husbands want to be treated that way, but that is not what he is saying. Paul is saying,

"You do this as an act of love to the Lord."

What should motivate you to do this? The verse is saying the thing that ought to motivate you is because the Spirit of God controls your life and the Spirit of God has revealed to you what the Scriptures say. In order for the Lord to make your family a functional family, you are willing to obey what He says. It's not because you love your husband that much, but it is because you love Jesus that much. That is key. As I love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to do whatever it is He tells me to do. A wife's love for Christ motivates her to obey. (Ephesians 5-22-33 by Wayne Barber)

**For Better Or Worse?** - Within a chip shot of our house is a golf course. When I stand in my backyard, I see ponds waiting hungrily for my next errant shot. At times I can imagine sandtraps and trees joking about my bad days.

I mention the sport with mixed feelings. I like to golf occasionally, but living so close to the course reminds me of my failures in playing the game, which has its disadvantages.

A similar problem can occur in marriage. Sometimes a husband and wife can lose sight of the hopes and dreams they once shared. Then the very presence of the other becomes a source of irritation, a reminder of past failures and disappointments.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he asked husbands and wives to turn their thoughts to their relationship with the Son of God (Eph 5:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 30, 31, 32, 33). In Him we find undying love and forgiveness for our failures. In Him we find Someone who loves to forget the worst and bring out the best. He reminds us not of what we've lost but of what we have yet to find.

Forgive us, Father, for focusing on our flaws and failures rather than on the love of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to rediscover our spouse in the light of our Lord's great love for us. —Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

REFLECTING ON MARRIAGE As a couple, recall the hopes and dreams you had when you were first married. Name some that have come true. Share with each other your hopes for the future.

**Marriages may be made in heaven,  
but they have to be worked out on earth.**

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**Work At It** - If your marriage isn't working, take heart. Neither is anyone else's. In every healthy marriage, it's the people who work, not the relationship. A newspaper featured two headlines shouting from adjacent pages: In Japan, "Battered Wives Begin To Rebel," and "Britain Tries To Shore Up Marriages." Different countries and distinct cultures, but the same problems. Why?

Could it be that we expect another person to meet the deepest needs of our hearts? If so, we have placed an impossible burden on that person. Or is it our own reluctance to face the truth about ourselves, preferring to believe that it is our spouse who has a problem?

The divine commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-33 are the framework for success in marriage, not a checklist to use in evaluating the performance of our spouse. It's a place to find our own job description. The instructions are given to weak, sinful people who need a Savior and His transforming power.

Most of us would prefer a successful and fulfilling marriage that just happens by itself. But a growing marriage requires effort and perseverance. God calls us to work at our relationship with Him—and with the person we promised to love. —D C McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

"For better or for worse," we pledge,  
Through sickness and through strife;  
And by God's grace and with His help  
We'll keep these vows for life. —D J De Haan

**Success in marriage is more than finding the right person;  
it is being the right person.**

---

**Realism And Romance** - Good marriages have a balance. The practical realities of daily living are enhanced by the joy and spontaneity of continually falling in love with each other.

Realism can help a husband to see that he is taking his wife for granted and is not being sensitive to her feelings. It can cause a wife to see that her critical comments are tearing down her husband's self-respect.

Realism is not enough, however. Romance, often discarded after the wedding, keeps a marriage from growing dull. It can prevent the kind of situation depicted in the cartoon of an elderly couple sitting on the front porch of their home. The husband is saying, "Sometimes, Sarah, when I think of how much you mean to me, I can hardly keep from telling you so."

Paul's words in Ephesians 5 encourage a love between two people that reflects Christ's self-sacrificing devotion to His church. In addition, it's a love filled with kindness and tenderness.

Whether you're dating or have been married half a year or half a century, Christ can help you balance your relationship with realism and romance. Keep drawing on His love and see what it does for your marriage. --D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Despite the faults that partners have,  
Their marriage still can thrive;  
But both must look to God for help  
To keep their love alive. --J D Branon

**The bonds of matrimony aren't worth much  
unless the interest is kept up.**

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**When To Speak Up** - Good communication is essential for a happy marriage. Poet Ogden Nash seems to have hit on a formula to help us remember how to communicate effectively. Nash, in his witty style, wrote:

If you want your marriage to sizzle  
With love in the loving cup,  
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;  
Whenever you're right, shut up!

There's some immensely helpful truth in that four-liner--truth that is supported by Scripture.

Let's look at the two major points. First, if we are wrong we need to admit it. Not only marriage, but all relationships benefit from this kind of honesty (Pr 12:22). Protecting ourselves when we're wrong makes resolution impossible.

On the other hand, we can be equally hard to live with if we insist that we're always right--and afraid to let our spouse know that we are fallible. According to 1Corinthians 13:4, "[Love] does not parade itself, is not puffed up." No one likes to be around someone who always seems to be patting himself on the back.

Two simple guidelines for a marriage that pleases God: Admit wrong and keep quiet about being right. It's a good way to keep the relationship strong. --J D Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Button up your lip securely  
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,  
But be swift with words of comfort,  
Words of praise, and words of cheer. --Loucks

**Let your speech be better than silence;  
otherwise be silent.**

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**Avoiding The Greener Grass** - Nancy Anderson says she grew lukewarm in her faith and thus believed the world's lie: "I deserve to be happy." This led to an extramarital affair that nearly ended her marriage. She wrote her book *Avoiding The Greener Grass Syndrome* to help keep her painful story of infidelity from "becoming someone else's story."

In her book, Nancy offers six action suggestions on how to build "hedges" to protect your marriage and to help make "a good marriage great":

- Hear**—give a listening ear to your spouse.
- Encourage**—build up your spouse by focusing on positive qualities.
- Date**—celebrate your marriage by playing and laughing together.
- Guard**—establish safeguards by setting clear boundaries.
- Educate**—study your mate to truly understand him or her.
- Satisfy**—meet each other's needs.

The grass on the other side of the fence may look greener, but faithfulness to God and commitment to your spouse alone bring peace of mind and satisfaction.

When you avoid the greener-grass syndrome by loving and respecting your spouse, your marriage will be a picture of Christ and His church to those around you (Ephesians 5:31, 32). —Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When you look at someone else's life,  
Thinking that it's better than your own,  
Just remember what God's given you  
Was designed for you alone. —Hess

**Jesus Christ is the only third party  
in a marriage who can make it work.**