

The Christian Home

Lesson 4: The Wife's Calling: Respect and Godly Submission -- Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Peter 3:1–6

There are words in the Bible that have been so misused that we flinch when we hear them, and “submission” is near the top of the list. It has been quoted by men who wanted their own way and weaponized to keep women small and silent and afraid. If that is the picture the word brings to mind, then we have to begin by clearing the ground, because that is not what Scripture means, and it never was. The God who fashioned the first woman from the man's side, who calls her a fellow heir of eternal life, who closes His ears to the prayers of a husband who mistreats her, is not in the business of belittling women. Whatever the Bible means by a wife's calling, it is something beautiful and strong, not something cramped and fearful.

So picture instead a different kind of woman. Picture a wife who knows exactly who she is in Christ, secure, unafraid, full of dignity, and who chooses, out of that strength, to support and honor and stand with her husband. Picture Sarah, whom Peter holds up as the model, a woman who followed her husband across the world on the strength of a promise, who was no shrinking violet (she once laughed out loud at God and argued her case), and yet who trusted God enough not to live in fear. Picture Abigail, who respected the order of her home and still acted with bold, quick wisdom to save lives when her foolish husband would have destroyed them. Godly submission has never meant becoming a doormat. It has always taken courage.

Paul and Peter call the wife to two things that the world rarely puts together: respect and godly submission to her own husband. Not to all men, not out of fear, not in violation of her conscience or her safety, but freely, “as to the Lord,” as her particular way of picturing the church's glad trust in Christ. It is the counterpart to the husband's call to lay himself down, and it is every bit as much an act of strength and faith. A wife who entrusts herself to God and supports her husband is not weak. She is doing one of the bravest things a person can do: trusting the Lord with an outcome she cannot control.

We need to say clearly, before we go a step further, what this calling is not. It is not servility. It is not silence. It is not fear. It is not the toleration of sin or abuse. No wife is ever asked by God to follow her husband into evil or to endure being harmed; her first allegiance is always to the Lord. With that ground cleared, read these verses with fresh eyes, wives, and let God show you a calling that is not a cage but a high and honored place: to be, in your home, a living picture of the people of God who gladly trust their Lord.

Group Discussion: The word “submission” carries a lot of baggage, much of it from genuine misuse. Based on these passages, and remembering that the wife is called a fellow heir of eternal life, how would you describe what godly submission is, and just as importantly, what it is not? Why is it so important to get both halves right?

Personal Reflection: Think about how you tend to respond when you disagree with your husband, or with anyone in authority over you. If you are not married, consider how you respond to leadership in general. Does your response usually reflect trust in God, or does it lean toward control, fear, or contempt?

Read Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Peter 3:1–6

Study Questions

1. Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... as the church submits to Christ” (Ephesians 5:22–24). Notice that he says “your own husbands,” not all men, and grounds it in the church’s relationship to Christ. What does godly submission actually mean here, and how does grounding it in the church’s trust in Christ keep it from becoming something demeaning?
2. Submission “as to the Lord” is offered freely to God, not extracted by force. Wives, is there an area where you find it genuinely hard to trust God by supporting your husband, perhaps because you fear the outcome or believe you know better? What would it look like to bring that area to the Lord this week?
3. Paul closes the passage by telling the wife to “see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Just as the husband is especially commanded to love, the wife is especially commanded to respect. Why do you think Scripture singles out respect as the wife’s particular calling, and what does genuine respect look like?
4. Respect shows up in tone, in words, and in the thousand small ways we honor or diminish someone. Wives, how do you speak to your husband, and about him to others? Where might criticism, contempt, or comparison have crept in, and what would it look like to rebuild a habit of honoring him?
5. Peter writes that wives may win even a husband who does not obey the word “without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (1 Peter 3:1–2). What does this teach about the quiet power of a godly life, and why would conduct sometimes accomplish what arguments and lectures cannot?
6. Most of us are tempted to try to change the people we love by words, pressure, or nagging. Wives, where have you been relying on words to change your husband, when God may be calling you to a more powerful witness of steady, godly conduct? What would change if you trusted your example to do what your arguments have not?
7. Peter directs wives away from merely external adorning and toward “the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Peter 3:3–4). What is the “gentle and quiet spirit,” and why does God call it precious and imperishable when the culture prizes the opposite?
8. We all pour our energy into what we believe makes us beautiful or valuable. Wives, be honest about where your energy actually goes, into the external and visible, or into the hidden person of the heart that God treasures? What is one way you could invest more in the beauty God says lasts?

9. Peter points to Sarah and the holy women of old, and then says wives are her children “if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening” (1 Peter 3:5–6). Godly submission is offered to the Lord, flows from faith rather than fear, and never requires a wife to follow her husband into sin or to endure abuse. How do these verses show that a wife’s ultimate trust is in God, and why is it essential to understand that submission is never a command to tolerate sin, fear, or mistreatment?
10. Look back across both passages, from submission “as to the Lord,” to honoring respect, to the winsome power of godly conduct, to the imperishable beauty God treasures. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the wife’s calling that you most need to carry into your marriage or your future this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Titus 2:3–5, older women training younger women to love their husbands and children and to be self-controlled and kind; Proverbs 31:10–31, the excellent wife whose worth is far above jewels and whose works praise her; Colossians 3:18–19, wives submitting as is fitting in the Lord and husbands loving without harshness; 1 Samuel 25:23–35, Abigail’s wise and courageous appeal showing that respect is not passive folly; 1 Peter 3:5–6, Sarah and the holy women who hoped in God and did not give way to fear