

Ephesians 5:22–24 | “A Wife’s Responsibility”  
*Preached on November 2, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 5:22–24 today, as we continue our series in the book of Ephesians. *[pauseeee]*

Today, we are going to be talking about marriage responsibilities, and specifically, the wife’s responsibility in marriage. *[pause]*

Next week, we will be looking at the husband’s responsibility, so don’t worry, we will get there.

But today it will be about what God calls wives to do. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you aren’t a wife and don’t have any plans to be married any time soon—you still need to pay attention. *[pause]*

Most people end up getting married, so single men and women, you can benefit by being *prepared* to know how a marriage is supposed to function.

And husbands, even though these verses aren’t directed towards you, they are important for you to know. *[pause]*

It’s critical that you know what your wife is supposed to do, and even more vitally, what she is NOT supposed to do. *[pause]*

So you aren’t to pay attention in order to nitpick her every move and demean her for failing, but so that you have the correct expectations of her responsibilities. *[pause]*

Many husbands have a *wrong* view of what their wife is to do, and so demand something that’s not in line with what Scripture says. *[pauseeeee]*

Now when it comes to marriage, a lot of different issues can come up that can do great damage. *[pause]*

Of course, infidelity can ruin a marriage.

Substance abuse and domestic violence can certainly destroy a marriage. *[pause]*

Financial stress, communication, unmet expectations, and a lack of intimacy can be the culprit, too.

But a common problem that today’s world doesn’t want to admit is that an incorrect understanding of the marriage responsibilities has led to myriads of issues. *[pauseeee]*

As a pastor, the number of marriage issues that I’ve counseled far exceeds any other counseling problem, and one of the major problems of these marriages is this very thing...

They have an incorrect understanding of their calling, and so aren't living that calling out.  
[pause]

But a correct view of the marriage responsibilities and obeying what God has commanded us to do as spouses solves a lot of *other* marital problems.

Because whether we follow God's way or not here directly impacts how husbands and wives relate to each other. [pauseeee]

So nothing may be more important than for couples to understand what they are called to do in marriage.

But here's the other thing—in our culture, probably nothing is more *controversial* than what I'm going to talk about. [pause]

Yet as Christians, culture doesn't determine how we are to function, Scripture does.

So let's look at what *Scripture* says about the responsibility of wives. [READ 22–24]

In Ephesians 5, Paul has been instructing us in how we are to live for the Lord—we are to walk in love, avoid sin, use wisdom, and be filled with the Spirit, among other things.

And now Paul is moving into how we are to live for the Lord in our family and work relationships, and he begins with the marriage relationship, speaking to wives first. [pauseeee]

*The main point is very clear here...*

**A wife is to submit to her husband.**

If I put that statement on social media right now, I would get utterly lambasted. [pause]

It's not popular in our day, yet it's very clear that that's what Paul calls wives to do.

I didn't even change the main word, but simply used the word that Paul used: submit. [pause]

I'm not making things up on the fly—I'm simply sharing what Scripture says. [pauseeee]

Now in order to believe this verse that is so culturally controversial, you must go back to *who* gave this command...

This command is ultimately given by God, for we believe that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God."<sup>1</sup> [pause]

This means that although Paul literally put this verse into writing, it was really the Spirit of God working through Paul to write exactly what God wanted.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

It is, therefore, God's very Word to us. *[pausee]*

Since this is God's Word that means that it's 100% true and without error, but it's also fully authoritative for our lives. *[pauseee]*

Everyone listening to me right now: know for certain then that this command 'to submit' is given by God and not by man. *[pauseee]*

This means that this command is *right*. *[pause]*

It's not a mistake, it's not wrong, it's not outdated—it's fully right, because God is always right.

God does not change, His Word doesn't change, and therefore this command is not culture-bound. *[pausee]*

It wasn't only good for Paul's time and culture, but is now not applicable to us in our time and culture.

No, for Paul even grounds the command in relation to Christ and the church. *[pauseee]*

Not only is this command to submit 'right,' but it's also 'good.' *[pause]*

Since God is good, then His commands are always and ever good. *[pauseee]*

Many Christians and even many pastors share this instruction for wives, and act like, "This is what God has said, but it's not what *I* would do. Sorry everyone, I know it's a little extreme." *[pause]*

No, I'm not going to apologize for God—Lord, may it never be!

We don't apologize for God, or act like He's being unreasonable, but we bow the knee to His commands and say, "Yes, they are good because they are from you, our good God!" *[pauseee]*

The marriage responsibilities then are fully right, fully true, fully good, and fully authoritative for us.

Let's not shy away from them, but believe them, receive them, and even *rejoice* in them, for they come to us from God Himself! *[pauseeee]*

Now that I've shared that important foundation, let's get into the main command here...

Verse 22 says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." *[pause]*

To submit is to arrange yourself under someone else.

It's a voluntary yielding to another person, and so showing deference to them. *[pause]*

This takes a certain humility and servant-mindedness, for we naturally want to put ourselves first, and *we* want to call the shots.

But we see here that a wife is to submit to her husband. *[pauseee]*

Now, know that submission does not mean that you are your husband's slave, who he can just order around for every little thing. *[pause]*

It does not mean that you are a doormat, unable to contribute thoughts or opinions.

I'll talk more about this next week, when I address husbands. *[pauseeee]*

Wives, also realize that submission doesn't make you inferior as a person, for God values each of His people. *[pause]*

Having different responsibilities and being under someone in a leadership structure does not take away your inherent value as a human being created in God's image. *[pause]*

In that case, Christians would be less valuable to God because Christians are to be subject to governing authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly it's not the case that God values unbelieving government leaders over His people! *[pauseeee]*

And think about how Christ willingly submitted to His Father while on earth—that didn't diminish His worth or value in the Trinity. *[pauseeee]*

So what is submission here?

It's a wife who is receptive, respectful, supportive, and helpful. *[pause]*

Sometimes thinking of the opposite can help us think through things...

So the opposite of a submissive wife is a wife who seeks to rule, control, or dominate, even in passive aggressive ways. *[pause]*

Not being submissive is when a wife tries to take charge and make decisions without her husband, or does the opposite of what he wanted. *[pause]*

She could be critical of him or talk down to him, or be resentful, reluctant, or argumentative when he *does* make a decision. *[pauseeee]*

Also, sometimes a wife is tempted to undermine her husband's leadership by complaining, nagging, or manipulating—that's not submission.

Rather, you are to provide encouragement, support, and help to your husband. *[pause]*

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<sup>2</sup> A reference to Romans 13:1ff.

Willingly put yourself under his leadership, and look *to him* to lead. *[pause]*

Doing this should be done with a willingness to serve, an inclination to listen, and a respectfulness in attitude. *[pauseeee]*

Paul adds in verse 22 that this submission is to be done, “as to the Lord.”

This means that a wife’s submission to her husband is an expression of her obedience to Christ. *[pauseeee]*

A Christian wife submits to her husband not because he’s just so amazing, but because she knows that she’s commanded to by the Lord, and wants to obey Him! *[pauseeee]*

Realize that this is a command, not an option, and many wives don’t think about it that way.

They do not realize that when they reject the command to submit, they are really disobeying God. *[pauseeee]*

This means that a wife cannot say, “Submission is just not in line with my personality.” *[pause]*

They can’t say, “But have you met my husband?!” *[pause]*

They can’t say, “That’s just not how we have chosen to do things in our marriage.”

No, you must submit, because you are *ultimately* doing it for the Lord—He commanded this! *[pauseeee]*

Since wives are to submit “as to the Lord,” this means that if her husband calls her to do something sinful, then she is to obey God, rather than her husband. *[pause]*

The Lord is the highest authority there is, and we dare not disobey the highest authority. *[pauseeee]*

Realize, too, that Paul does not call husbands to *make* their wives submit. *[pause]*

Husbands, if you do this, you have violated multiple Biblical instructions.

You are not to try to put her in her place by any sort of force or manipulation—that is sinful and inexcusable.

Instead, Paul directly calls on wives to do what they are supposed to do, for they are responsible before God for how they conduct themselves. *[pauseeee]*

*Now the question is why? Why does God call wives to submit? Because...*

### I. **There is a structure.**

Life is filled with structure. *[pause]*

Without structure, you have chaos.

So to build a house, for example, you need a structure. *[pause]*

For a society to function, you need a structure like government, laws, and institutions. *[pause]*

For a school or company to run smoothly, you need things arranged in a certain order.

This is why at the workplace, people have roles and responsibilities, and there's some sort of leader or supervisor. *[pause]*

It's the structure that keeps things in order, and actually helps the workplace to run smoothly. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever been a part of a group with no clear leader or structure?

Without a leader, accomplishing goals becomes extremely difficult and there's a lot of confusion and frustration.

Well, God has set up the world to work in structured ways. *[pause]*

He has put parents over children.

He has put governing authorities over their specific realm.

He has put leaders in the church, and so on.

Therefore, having a structure within marriage is not some curveball that God threw us—it's actually in accordance with how He works. *[pauseeee]*

So why are wives to submit?

Verse 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." *[pause]*

Paul is showing us that marriage has a structure—the husband is the head of the wife. *[pauseeee]*

This image of the 'head' means that this person has leadership and authority. *[pause]*

Think of a head and a body—it's the head that sits atop, and so leads and guides the body.

So also, the husband leads and the wife responds in harmony with the husband. *[pause]*

It's actually supposed to be a beautiful, complementary thing, like a healthy body is.

Just like a healthy head and body work together to accomplish great things, a husband and wife can accomplish great things when they function within their set places! *[pauseeee]*

Has your mind ever wanted to do something, but your body said, “Nope, not gonna happen”?  
[pause]

It doesn't work well, and you end up not being able to do what you wanted to do. [pauseee]

When a husband and wife are having a power struggle, it's like that—it doesn't work.

There's tension, there's bickering, there's resentment, and the marriage just doesn't function the way that it should. [pauseeee]

You see, this is the way that God has structured marriage—He created marriage and designed it to work a certain way.

Don't you think He knows how each person is supposed to function? [pause]

That means that when you follow God's structure for marriage, you are actually going to experience a marriage that thrives with *more* joy and fulfillment.

But when you go against God's design, you will experience issue after issue because you are 'going against the grain,' so to say. [pauseeee]

Wives, know that this structure is not based on personal knowledge, skill, wisdom, or ability.

So you can't say, “But I'm smarter than my husband, so I should be the head!” [pause]

There are many women who are smarter, wiser, and godlier than their husbands, but Paul adds no such qualifiers.

Rather, this is based on *design*—God ordered marriages to be this way from the beginning.

So this command doesn't change based on your husband's flaws or shortcomings. [pauseeee]

Now when people think of leadership and authority, they immediately think of the ways that people *abuse* them.

But this does not make 'leadership' and 'authority' inherently bad, but they are functions of structure, position, and responsibility.

So do not let the abuse of leadership and authority deter you from obeying what God has said.  
[pause]

The problem isn't with the *structure* of marriage, the problem is with the *misuse* of the structure of marriage. [pauseeee]

Putting all this together—a wife who submits to her husband is rightly recognizing the God-ordained structure. [pause]

Genuine submission is, therefore, an act of joyful alignment with God's good design.

The submissive wife finds joy and satisfaction in the place that God has assigned her, knowing it's good because it's from God. *[pauseeee]*

Notice how Paul connects this structure with the relationship of Christ and the church. *[pause]*

One commentator put it well: “As Christ and the church cannot exchange places, the analogy used does not permit husband and wife to exchange places either.”<sup>3</sup> *[pause]*

This means that this command is not bound to the ancient culture in which Paul is living and writing.

And actually, in the following verses that we will cover next week, what Paul calls husbands to was completely *counter-cultural* for his day. *[pause]*

Paul wasn't trying to be culturally-sensitive because his instructions to husbands were the complete opposite!

Instead, what we find is that marriage was always meant to picture Christ and the church, and so the structure of marriage is timeless, not time-bound. *[pauseeee]*

*Speaking of Christ and the church, that's what Paul expands on further, as we see that wives are to also submit because...*

## II. There is a pattern.

In order to make accurate cuts of wood, carpenters use a template cut to the exact size and shape they need to guide them as they cut. *[pause]*

They then use that template to cut other pieces of wood, so as to make sure that they are all the same...

Every other piece of wood must be matched to that template or pattern. *[pause]*

Well in a way, Paul is showing us that marriage has a pattern that it ought to be matched to: Christ and the church. *[pauseeee]*

Listen for the direct connection between the marriage relationship and Christ and the church in verses 23–24...

“For the husband is the head of the wife *even as* Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, *so also* wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, vol. 10, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Eph 5:22–33.

In our marriages, we have a pattern to follow and match up to. *[pauseeee]*

Did you observe what Paul didn't say?

He didn't say, "Our culture's marriages are set up like this, so let our marriages be matched to our culture." *[pause]*

He didn't say, "This is what I feel or what *seems* right, so line it up with that."

He points to the relationship of Christ and the church as the pattern for marriage. *[pause]*

This means that a husband and wife should continually be evaluating whether their marriage matches up with the relationship between Christ and the church.

It's their pattern to follow! *[pauseeee]*

You are not to evaluate whether your marriage simply looks like everyone else's—that's a flawed pattern. *[pause]*

You are not to evaluate whether your marriage lines up with what the current cultural moment says—that's an ever-changing pattern.

No, you are to follow the constant, God-ordained pattern of Christ and the church. *[pauseeee]*

So for wives specifically, how does this pattern help you?

It reminds you that your position is like the church in the Christ-church relationship. *[pause]*

As the church submits to Christ, so you should submit to your husband. *[pauseeee]*

Paul is not saying that your husband *is* Christ, nor is he perfect, but there should be a similar type of submission to him, like the church submits to Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Think about how the church submits to Christ—it involves a humble, receptive willingness to listen and heed. *[pause]*

It involves respect and looking to his leadership. *[pause]*

Wives, this is your pattern, so that means that a helpful thing for you to do is to regularly consider if you are matching up to how the church relates to Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Think about this point, too—the church doesn't crouch down in dread of Christ. *[pause]*

John Piper puts it well, "Submission is not slavish or coerced or cowering. That's not the way Christ wants the church to respond to his leadership and protection and provision.

He wants the submission of the church to be free and willing and glad."<sup>4</sup> *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-1>.

You don't submit to your husband as a cowering slave.

You submit in a glad, voluntary way that sees your relational dynamic with your husband as a God-given pattern that reflects Christ and the church.

And therefore, it is a *beautiful* and *God-glorifying* thing when you follow that pattern. *[pauseeee]*

Since God has provided the pattern, then there is no place for *begrudging* submission. *[pause]*

Would God be pleased if the church reluctantly followed Christ? *[pause]*

Would God be pleased if the church submitted to Christ with an attitude? *[pause]*

Would He like it if the church said, "This is not what *I* want, but I just gotta do it!"

No, the church willingly submits to Christ and does it with joy!

They don't see it as demeaning or humiliating or shameful to relate to Christ in this way.

So also, wives do not see your responsibility in these ways, either. *[pauseeee]*

Yes, I know that your husband isn't Christ. *[pause]*

Yes, I know that he has lots of his own problems, flaws, and weaknesses, but you can still submit with respect and a joyful acceptance of God's design. *[pauseeee]*

That's really what this comes down to—will you willingly and joyfully accept God's design for marriage, or will you reject it? *[pause]*

Will you consider His ways good or bad?

Because submission to your husband is a command from God to you. *[pause]*

You are to do it because He has structured marriage in this way, and it's patterned after Christ and the church.

So when you gladly submit, you are gladly submitting to the order established by God. *[pause]*

You are saying, "Yes Lord, I love you. You are good and so your ways are always good. So I will joyfully accept how you have designed marriage and my calling in it." *[pauseeee]*

Wives, what is your mindset and attitude towards your responsibility? *[pause]*

Is it rejection, anger, or bitterness? *[pause]*

Is it begrudging acceptance, or is it humble acceptance of God's good and beautiful structure? *[pauseeee]*

Are you showing respect for your husband's calling, or do you try to take over his responsibility?  
*[pause]*

*Do you have an attitude of willingness to let your husband lead? [pause]*

I know that this isn't easy, for I know what we as husbands can be like!

*But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, rather, know that whatever God calls you to do, He will give you the power to do it. [pause]*

You aren't left on your own to do this in your own power.

*Instead, God loves you so much that He sent Jesus Christ to die for your sins and in your place. [pause]*

He saved you in grace, redeemed you, and has provided forgiveness for your sins.

*He then rose again, and for all those who trust in Christ, He gives them the Holy Spirit! [pause]*

Now through faith, you have Spirit-given power to live for God! *[pause]*

*You can be filled with the Spirit, and do what He has called you to do, so this means that you have all that you need to submit to your husband. [pauseeee]*

You have the Spirit within, who empowers you.

*You have the pattern to follow in Christ and the church, and you have a loving Lord, who is always with you. [pause]*

Look to Him, wives! *[pause]*

*Trust Him and His ways! [pause]*

He's so good, and He's so loving, even if your husband isn't.

*So cling to Him and follow His Word, it's so worth it.*