
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON CXVIII : THE WISE AND SPIRIT FILLED LIFE OF SUBMISSION / THE HAUSTAFEL (5:15-6:9)

Ephesians 5:22-24 — Paul to the WIVES —

²² Wymmen, be thei suget to her hosebondis, as to the Lord, ²³ for the man is heed of the wymman, as Crist is heed of the chirche; he is sauour of his bodi. ²⁴ But as the chirche is suget to Crist, so wymmen to her hosebondis in alle thingis. (John Wycliffe Bible, 1382)

²² Wemen submit youre selves vnto youre awne husbandes as vnto the Lorde. ²³ For the husbande is the wyves heed even as Christ is the heed of the congregacion and the same is the saveoure of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the congregacion is in subieccion to Christ lykwyse let the wyves be in subieccion to their husbandes in all thinges. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1534)

²² Wiues, submit your selues vnto your husbands, as vnto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the wiues head, euen as Christ is the head of the Church, and the same is the sauour of his body. ²⁴ Therefore as the Church is in subiection to Christ, euen so let the wiues be to their husbands in euery thing. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (King James Version, 1769)

²² The wives! to your own husbands subject yourselves, as to the Lord, ²³ because the husband is head of the wife, as also the Christ is head of the assembly, and he is saviour of the body, ²⁴ but even as the assembly is subject to Christ, so also are the wives to their own husbands in everything. (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

²² Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. (Revised Version, 1885)

²² Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. (American Standard Version, 1901)

²² Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

²² The wives, be putting yourselves in subjection with implicit obedience to your own husbands as to the Lord, ²³ because a husband is head of the wife as the Christ is Head of the Church, He himself being the Saviour of the Body. ²⁴ Nevertheless, as the Church subjects itself in obedience to the Christ, in this manner also the wives should subject themselves in obedience to their husbands

in all things. (Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation, 1961)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (New King James Version, 1982)

²² Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (New International Version, 2011)

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (English Standard Version, 2016)

²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, ²³ because the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church (he himself being the savior of the body). ²⁴ But as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (New English Translation Second Edition, 2017)

²² Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὑποτάσσεσθε, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ ²³ ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶν σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. ²⁴ ἀλλ' ὡς περ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

²² αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, ²³ ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. ²⁴ ἀλλ' ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. (NA28 Greek New Testament)

Introductory Thoughts on These Next Few Sections

“With the Fall and its curse came the distortion of woman’s proper submissiveness and of man’s proper authority. That is where the battle of the sexes began, where women’s liberation and male chauvinism came into existence. Women have a sinful inclination to usurp man’s authority and men have a sinful inclination to put women under their feet. The divine decree that man would rule over woman in this way was part of God’s curse on humanity, and it takes a manifestation of grace in Christ by the filling of the Holy Spirit to restore the created order and harmony of proper submission in a relationship that has become corrupted and disordered by sin. Eve was created from Adam’s rib and ordained to be his companion, to be, as Adam himself beautifully testified, ‘bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen. 2:22-23). God’s curse did not change His basic plan for mutuality in the marriage relationship or for the functional authority of the husband over the wife. Man was created first and was created generally to be physically, constitutionally, and emotionally stronger than woman, who is ‘a weaker vessel’ (1 Pet. 3:7). Both

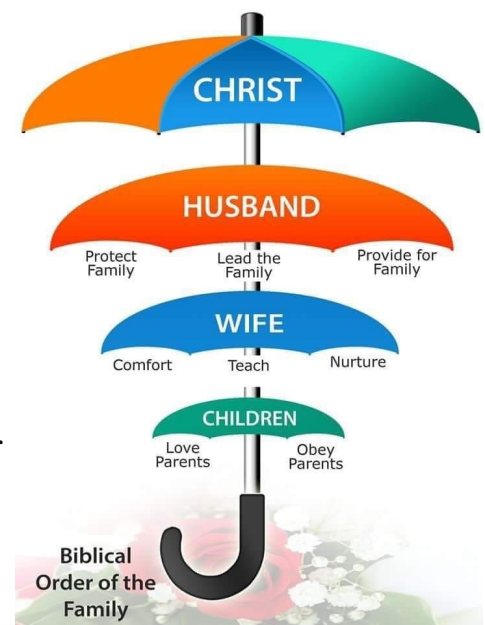
before and after the Fall and the consequent curse, man was called to be the provider, protector, guide, and shepherd of the family, and woman called to be supportive and submissive.” [MacArthur, 281f; see also Lincoln, 353f; O’Brien, 410; Hoehner, 729f]

THESE ARE SPIRITUAL GRACES — *One of the misconceptions of thinking we can change our spouse when we see what we believe to be their Ephesians 5 shortcomings is that we are the ones who are able to make them change. That’s a fundamental error. For a wife to submit to her husband or a husband to properly love and lead his wife requires the work of the Holy Spirit (as does all spiritual graces). This also applies to when we see our own shortcomings in these areas. The Lord never commands us to stir up some human inertia within us to obey His commands; nothing He commands is capable of being obeyed in our own strength alone.* (Men may hit-or-miss or

obey outwardly short-term but no one can live the Christian life apart from the Holy Spirit.) As Martyn Lloyd-Jones commented in his book ‘Sermon on the Mount,’ the first step is understanding an area of short-coming (in his comments, Christ in the Beatitudes) which is usually followed by an effort to obey those commands in our own strength. That leads to failure and frustration, and sadly too often to the conclusion that we cannot live such a life and quit trying. But the Lord’s purpose in having us fail is to make us understand we cannot live in obedience on our own efforts, all of our obedience must be based upon reliance on the Holy Spirit’s enabling. That is not just true concerning the Beatitudes but to our Ephesians 5 passage as well. **Husbands, want a wife that submits as Paul commands? Pray for your wife. Wives, want a husband that loves you and is the spiritual leader as Paul commands? Pray for your husband. That is the most important thing we can do for our spouse, and often other means used to obtain these goals will end in frustration, ill-will between the spouses, and heartache.**

PAUL DIRECTS US TO OUR OWN HEARTS — So often when these verses are mentioned our thoughts immediately turn to, “Well, if you knew my husband...” or “if you knew my wife...”. **But Paul gives no allowance for our spouse and makes these commands as between the believer and the Lord. We are to obey these admonitions (as all other commands in the Scriptures) as an act of devotion to our Lord and Master, regardless of circumstances** (see below for more detail).

AS WITH ALL OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE, THESE ARE AREAS OF GROWTH — The Apostle Peter admonishes us to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ (2 Pet 3:18) When we consider Bible study, we would readily admit we are growing in that area and are becoming better students of the Word of God (hopefully). When we think of prayer, we would readily admit our growth and need for more growth in our prayer life (hopefully). The same with any other area: serving the Lord, witnessing, our thought-life, our worship, self-discipline. We often readily admit past failures and express a need for growth, a desire to grow, and hopefully can see some evidence of growth in our spiritual walk with Christ. **But we often are reluctant to admit those same truths when it comes to submission (for the wives) and spiritual leadership (for the husbands). This might be because Paul is here talking about the most intimate of all relationships, the source of so much joy but also the potential of great hurt and pain. As in all areas of our Christian life, it would be wise to recognize our failures, admit**



that we have not yet “arrived”, and pray for growth in these areas concerning our spouses. As with all sin, there is a blindness to our own shortcomings and we should make our own failures a matter of prayer rather than focusing on our spouse. Nowhere does Matt. 7:3-5 more applicable than in our marriage relationships!

Wives — vv. 22-24

v. 22 — DOES VERSE 22 HAVE THE WORD ‘SUBMIT YOURSELVES’ OR IS IT BORROWED FROM THE PRECEDING VERSE? — Wives, submit to your own husbands,

— Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὑποτάσσεσθε, [Hai gynaikes tois idiois andrasin hupotassesthe, (Stephanus Greek NT)] — αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν [hai gynaikes tois idiois andrasin (NA28 Greek NT)] — The answer to that question is “*it depends upon what manuscripts or version is being used.*” Bruce Metzger explains why the committee for the latest Greek

manuscripts made the decision as they did: “On the one hand, several early witnesses (P⁴⁶ B Clement^{1/2} Origen Greek mss^{acc. to Jerome} Jerome Theodore) begin the new sentence without a main verb, thus requiring that the force of the preceding ὑποτασσόμενοι [hupotassomenoi, ‘submitting’] be carried over. On the other hand, the other witnesses read either ὑποτάσσεσθε, [hupotassesthe, ‘submit yourselves’] or ὑποτάσσεσθωσαν [hupotassesthōsan, ‘let them submit themselves’] after either γυναῖκες [gynaikes, ‘women, wives’] or ἀνδράσιν [andrasin, ‘men, husbands’]. A majority of the Committee preferred the shorter reading, which accords with the succinct style of the author’s admonitions, and explained the other readings as expansions introduced for the sake of clarity, the main verb being required especially when the words Αἱ γυναῖκες [hai gynaikes, ‘the women, the wives’] stood at the beginning of a scripture lesson.” [Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second edition, 1994, p. 541; see also The Englishman’s Greek New Testament, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 1970; p. 509; also Salmond, 365] The variations appear as follows:

‘the wives to their own husbands SUBMIT YOURSELVES [2nd person verb imperative], *as to the Lord’*; followed by Stephens, 1550; found in mss K L, some cursives, Syriac, Chrysostom, etc.

‘the wives SUBMIT YOURSELVES [2nd person verb imperative] *to their own husbands, as to the Lord’*; found in mss D G

‘the wives to their own husbands LET THEM SUBMIT THEMSELVES [3rd person verb imperative], *as to the Lord’*; followed by Lachmann, 1842-1850; Tregelles, 1857-1872; found in mss & A P17, Boh., Goth., Vulgate, Arm., etc.

‘the wives to their own husbands, as to the Lord’ with the verb being borrowed from the preceding verse; followed by Tischendorf, eighth edition, 1865-1873; Alford, 1858-1870; Wescott-Hort; found in B, Clement, Jerome

Most of the commentators I have used in my studies believe ‘submit’ in v. 22 was originally omitted by Paul when he wrote Ephesians. This by Ernest Best provides a good summation of many of the comments I have read: “Because (i) of the variation in both position and form of the inserted verb, (ii) of the absence of any satisfactory reason for its omission if once present, and (iii) its presence would clarify the connection between v. 22 and v. 21, the absence of any form of the verb is the correct reading. It probably came to be inserted when 5.22-33 was read as a unit in worship; a lectionary reading could hardly begin with a verbless sentence.” [Best, 531; see also

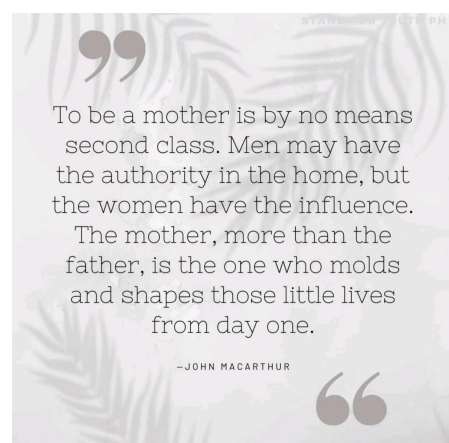
Lincoln, 351; 367; Hoehner, 730f; Arnold, 380; O'Brien, 411; Moule, 138; A. T Robertson] *But whether the verb 'submit' is present or not makes no difference to the text; if missing (as most agree) then that tightens the connection between 5:21 and 5:22. "The idea is: 'Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ [and, as a first example,] wives, . . . to your own husbands.'"* [MacArthur, 280; see also Thielman, 375]

‘SUBMIT’ DEFINED — The word for ‘submit’ is used twice in these verses, once in v. 22 (see the comments above) and once in v. 24 (some versions use the word twice but the second time is implied; see comments below). Both of these verbs are from the root ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō] and means *‘to take a subordinate role in relation to that of another.’* In v. 22 the word refers to wives while in v. 24 the immediate use of the word is used of the churches and Christ, which serves as an example for the husband / wife relationship. Both the churches and the wives subject themselves to their head as a matter of their will, thus the churches benefit from the headship of Christ and so also should the wife’s submission enhance her well-being. [Hoehner, 745]

As we saw in lesson 23e, this word was used of ordered relationships in a social structure ranging from slaves to masters, to citizens in a state, to the various ranks within the military, to the present context of wives to husbands. *At the heart of this submission is the notion of ‘order’; God has established certain leadership and authority roles and submission is a humble recognition of that divine ordering. Paul’s admonition to wives is therefore an appeal to free and responsible persons which can only be heeded voluntarily, never by the elimination or breaking of the human will, much less by means of a servile submissiveness. The verb Paul uses is ‘reflective’ indicating a voluntary submission (the passive would suggest a forced submission, a thought foreign to this context; there is no indication that the churches’ submission to Christ is forced).* The verb in v. 22 is rendered ‘submit yourselves’ or ‘subject yourselves’ (Tyndale, Geneva, KJV, YLT, NIV), ‘submit’ (NKJV, ESV, NET, commentators Harold Hoehner, Clinton Arnold, Andrew Lincoln, Peter O’Brien), ‘be subject’ (Wycliffe NT, RSV, NASV; commentator F. F. Bruce), and ‘be in subjection’ (RV, ASV, commentator S. D. F. Salmond). Ernest Best attempts to bring out the ‘subordination in rank’ aspect by translating the verse as follows: ‘wives, subordinate yourselves to your husbands, as to the Lord.’ [see Best, 517; Lincoln, 367; Hoehner, 731f; Arnold, 380; O’Brien, 411f; Moule, 137f; AT Robertson, Word Pictures; MacArthur, 280]

“The idea of subordination to authority in general, as well as in the family, is out of favour in a world which prizes permissiveness and freedom. Christians are often affected by these attitudes. Subordination smacks of exploitation and oppression that are deeply resented. But authority is not synonymous with tyranny, and the submission to which the apostle refers does not imply inferiority. Wives and husbands (as well as children and parents, servants and masters) have

different God appointed roles, but all have equal dignity because they have been made in the divine image and in Christ have put on the new person who is created to be like God (4:24). Having described the single new humanity which God is creating in his Son, with its focus on the oneness in Christ of all, especially Jew and Gentile (cf. Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28), the apostle ‘does not now [in this household table] destroy his own thesis by erecting new barriers of sex, age and rank in God’s new society in which they have been abolished’. That the verb ‘submit, be subordinate’ can be used of Christ’s submission to the authority of the Father (1 Cor. 15:28) shows that it can denote a functional subordination





without implying inferiority, or less honour and glory.”

[O’Brien, 411f] Paul uses forms of our word ‘hupotassō’ three times in 1 Cor 15:28 (Young’s Literal Translation): ‘and when the all things may be subjected to him, then the Son also himself shall be subject to Him, who did subject to him the all things, that God may be the all in all.’ (1 Cor 15:28 YLT)

“It literally means ‘to rank under.’ Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that ‘rank’ has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability. A colonel is higher in rank than a private, but that does not necessarily mean that the colonel is a better man than the

private. It only means that the colonel has a higher rank and, therefore, more authority. ‘*Let all things be done decently and in order*’ (1 Cor 14:40) is a principle God follows in His creation. ***Just as an army would be in confusion if there were no levels of authority, so society would be in chaos without submission.*** Children should submit to their parents because God has given parents the authority to train their children and discipline them in love. Employees should submit to employers and obey them (Eph 6:5-8, where the immediate reference is to household slaves, but the application can be made to workers today). Citizens should submit to government authorities, even if the authorities are not Christians (Rom 13; 1 Peter 2:13-20). **Submission is not subjugation. Submission is recognizing God’s order in the home and the church and joyfully obeying it. When a Christian wife joyfully submits to the Lord and to her own husband, it should bring out the best in her. (For this to happen, the husband must love his wife and use God’s order as a tool to build with, not a weapon to fight with, Eph 5:18-33.) Submission is the key to spiritual growth and ministry: Husbands should be submitted to the Lord, Christians should submit to each other (Eph 5:21), and wives should be submitted to the Lord and to their husbands.** [Wiersbe, *Be Faithful: NT Commentary 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (David C Cook; Colorado Springs CO) 1981, second edition 2009; p40]

“The basic idea presented here and repeated in 5:24b is that women should not seek to assert themselves in the home in a way that could be viewed as ruling, controlling, or dominating. Rather, they must acknowledge the God-given role assigned to the husband and respect the leadership he endeavors to provide for the family.” [Arnold, 380]

STRUCTURE DOES NOT DENY EQUALITY — ***That there is a hierarchical structure in society does not deny equality. It should be noted in this household code those who are to be subordinate (wives, children, and slaves) are addressed as their own moral agents (in contrast to secular haustafeln found at that time). Since the wives are addressed directly and husbands are not told what to do if the wives do not submit, it is probably right to assume that their subordination will be voluntary.*** This coheres with Gal 3:28 where women are regarded as equal members in the churches with men:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28 NKJV)

Note as well there are equal sexual rights within marriage and the husband is not depicted as governing his wife in this respect, a concept which was unheard of in Paul’s day:

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her

husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Cor 7:3-5 NKJV)

Some would propose that the patriarchal structure mentioned in Ephesians needs to be reoriented in terms of today's culture. Rather than a reorientation of Ephesians in terms of today's culture, there needs to be a serious reexamination and proper application of the text where the hierarchical structure does not demean women anymore than Christ demeans His churches. [Best, 532ff; Hoehner, 735f; Lincoln, 367]

‘SUBMIT’ (HUPOTASSŌ) FOR WIFE, ‘OBEY’ (HUPAKOUŌ) FOR CHILDREN / SLAVES

— Paul makes a change in verbiage in this passage that is important to note. When speaking to wives, the word Paul uses is ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō, ‘to submit’] but when addressing children and servants the word Paul uses is ὑπακούω [hupakouō, ‘to obey’]. Whether this is significant or not is debated, and much would depend upon the context in which these terms are used; as Ernest Best says, “Relationships can only be defined in terms of the attitudes of all involved in them.” For example, subordination to the chain of command in the army would be different from a similar chain in civil service, business, or as is the case here, the family. ***True, ‘to submit’ is a broader term than the stronger word ‘to obey’ but to voluntarily subordinate oneself to another involves the willingness to obey that person. Certainly our churches’ subordination to Christ (upon which the wife’s subordination to her husband is based, v. 24) would be seen as involving glad obedience. So while there is obviously a difference between willing submission and imposed obedience, there would be little distinction between voluntary subordination and voluntary obedience.*** Peter even uses the two terms almost synonymously in 1 Pet 3:5,6 (but note in 1 Pet 3:1-6 the husband is hostile while in Eph 5:22-33 the husband loves his wife):

“Wives, likewise, be submissive [ὑποτασσόμεναι, hupotassomenai; from ὑποτάσσω, hupotassō, ‘to submit’] to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive [ὑποτασσόμεναι, hupotassomenai; from ὑποτάσσω, hupotassō, ‘to submit’] to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed [ὑπήκουσεν, hupēkousen; from ὑπακούω, hupakouō, ‘to obey’] Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (1 Pet 3:1-6 NKJV)

Perhaps a better way to approach Paul’s change in verbiage is to consider this from the husband’s perspective rather than from the wife’s. A husband is not to treat his wife as a servant or a child but as an equal for whom God has given him the care and responsibility for provision and protection, to be exercised in love. She is not his to order about, responding to his every wish and command. Note as well that Paul nowhere in this discussion is the husband to force his wife to submit; the wife is enjoined to voluntarily subordinate herself to her husband as service to the Lord Jesus, but the husband’s only recourse in the event that submission is absent is to love, provide, protect and serve his wife and family as Christ does His churches. [Best,

533; Lincoln, 367f; Arnold, 356; MacArthur, 280f]

HOW FAR DOES ‘MUTUAL SUBMISSION’ IN v.21 GO? IS THE HUSBAND TO SUBMIT TO THE WIFE? —

Some would suggest in light of ‘mutual submission’ found in v. 21 that husbands are also commanded to ‘submit to the wives’ rather than the submission of the wives only. But that would place a wrong emphasis upon Paul’s admonition to be in ‘mutual submission’. *Paul’s command to the husbands in the household code is to love their wives; there is no indication in the household code for the husbands to be submissive to their wives, nor is Christ to be submissive to His churches, nor are parents to be submissive to their children, nor are masters to be submissive to their servants. Is this a contradiction of v. 21? Would Paul say one thing then in the very next breath contradict himself?*

Each statement must be kept in context and in proper balance. *Eph 5:21 relies upon the command ‘be filled with the Holy Spirit’ and has to do with believers in the midst of other believers, but as we saw in lesson 23e even that context had those who were in authority and places of leadership. For example Peter says in 1 Pet 5:5 younger believers are exhorted to be subject to the elders but immediately follows with the admonition that all, including the elders, be in subjection one to another and be filled with all humility. The second command does not cancel the first.* There are people in positions of authority but they are not to ‘lord it over’ those ‘under them’ (1 Pet 5:3). As we saw in the definition of the word ‘submit, be in subjection,’ this has to do with order, not quality of persons. But if both husband and wife are ‘on the same order’ so-to-speak, then there is no order. *Any attempt to prove the husband is to subject himself to the wife in the same manner as the wife is to subject herself to her husband arises not from sound exegesis but from an attempt to prevent the husband from misusing his responsibility. While attempting to correct an obvious error, the order established by Paul (and ultimately the Lord Himself) in this passage is destroyed.* [Hoehner, 732ff; Bruce, 383; Arnold, 380]

PAUL NOT SPEAKING TO ‘ALL WOMEN’ IN GENERAL BUT TO ‘WIVES’ —

The words αἱ γυναῖκες [hai gynaikes] can refer to women in general but the context demands the reference is to wives. If Paul had meant that all females are to be submissive to all males, he would have used the adjectives θῆλυς [thēlus], ‘female,’ and ἀρσεν [arsēn], ‘male,’ as he does in Gal 3:28 rather than the nouns γυνή [gynē], ‘woman, wife,’ and ἀνὴρ [anēr], ‘man, husband’ (cf. Matt 5:28, 31 32). *Note was well that ‘wives’ is not qualified, therefore this applies to all believing wives regardless of social standing, education, intelligence, spiritual maturity or giftedness, age, experience or any other consideration. Nor is it qualified by her husband’s intelligence, character, attitude, spiritual condition or any other consideration.* [Hoehner, 730; 732; Best, 531f; O’Brien, 411; MacArthur, 280]

‘TO THEIR OWN HUSBAND’ —

Originally the adjective ἰδίους [idiois] had the idea of ‘that which is one’s own, that which is private or personal,’ in contrast to that which belongs to another or is public or common. However, by NT times it no longer had that significance and it differed little, if at all, from a reflexive or a possessive pronoun. Paul simply means that the wife is to submit to her husband as opposed to men in general. All the translations therefore says ‘your husbands’ or ‘their husbands’ or the like, and properly so. Paul is not saying for ‘all women submit to every man’ but rather the wife to her own husband, suggesting a holy speciality of the marriage

When I imagine that I want to learn to
love God--

and to **love my husband and others** whom
GOD has given me to **Love**--let me test the
desire of my willingness to accept

TRIAL AND GRIEF. If I can welcome them--
-Yes, Lord!--and believe God’s

purpose in them,

**I am learning the
lesson
of love.**

*If I cannot, it’s a
fair indication
that my desire to
love is a delusion.*

Elisabeth Elliot



relationship. Paul will later continue to tell the husband to love *‘their own’* wife (v. 28; cf. v. 33). [Best, 532; O’Brien, 411; Salmond, 365; Moule, 138; Bruce, 384; Thielman, 375; MacArthur, 281; Vincent, Word Studies]

MOTIVATION: THE WIFE SUBMITTING TO HER HUSBAND IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP — as to the Lord. — ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ [hōs tō kuriō.] — The phrase ‘as to the Lord’ **could be taken causally, meaning that wives should submit because of the Lord.** Most reject this sense because (1) it depends heavily upon Col 3:18 which is not the exact phrase, and (2) the phrase immediately following this is introduced with ‘because’ and thus is the causal clause. **It could be comparative, namely the wives are to submit to their husbands to the same degree as they do the Lord.** The problem with this view is the NT never calls for submission to another human being to the same degree as to the Lord. For these reasons most commentators prefer (3) **as she submits to her husband she also submits to her Lord;** the adverb could therefore be rendered ‘as’ or ‘just as’. Some compare this to Christ’s statement of those who visit, feed and clothe the poor, *‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’* (Matt 25:40). **Thus as the wife submits to the husband she also submits to Christ; the relation of husband and wife is not only ‘horizontal’ but also contains a ‘vertical’ component. The wife’s subordination is then a religious act and has a wider context than that of the contemporary patriarchal understanding of the family.** [Hoehner, 737f; Best, 533; Lincoln, 368; O’Brien, 412; Salmond, 366; Moule, 138; Thielman, 376; MacArthur, 288; Hodge, 227f]

‘LORD’ IS THE LORD JESUS, NOT HUSBANDS — When Paul concludes the verse with a motivation ‘as to the Lord’, ‘lord’ is not the husband but refers to our Lord Jesus. If the reference were to husbands then Paul would have used the plural ‘to the Lords’ to correspond to the plural ‘to ... husbands’. As we will see when we consider v. 23, what Paul is saying is that the wife should voluntarily submit herself to her husband as a service to the Lord Jesus, as if submitting to the Lord Himself. But beginning as early as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) some have argued that Paul is referring to the husband ‘as a lord’ based upon Peter’s statement of Sarah calling Abraham ‘lord’ in 1 Pet 3:6. Others agree saying Paul switches to the singular in v. 23 so the singular ‘lord’ in v. 22 is appropriate. This is incorrect for five reasons: (1) Paul does not switch to the singular until v. 23, v. 22 is a complete phrase in and of itself and therefore ‘lord’ would need to be plural to refer to husbands. (2) The context supports this as a reference to our Lord Jesus as the next two verses refers to Christ as the head of the churches. (3) While not identical, Paul says this in the parallel passage in Colossians: ‘wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord’ (Col 3:18) which is an obvious reference to our Lord Jesus. (4) Paul uses the same adverbial phrase [hos to kurio] in 6:7 where slaves are to serve with goodwill as to the Lord and not as ‘men-pleasers’. There their masters are called ‘the lords’ (6:5,9) but the singular in 6:7 cannot refer to their ‘master’ (singular) because of the contrast with ‘men-pleasers’, plus the ‘Lord’ (singular) in 6:7 is also Lord of their masters (6:8,9). The only other place this phrase is used is in Col 3:23 which parallels Eph 6:5-9, and the remarks on the Ephesian passage applies as well to the Colossian passage. Since the only other times this phrase is used refers to our Lord Jesus, it is reasonable to think it refers to Christ here as well. (5) Paul uses a very similar phrase in 6:5, ‘slaves, obey your human masters [‘lords’, plural] with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ’. [Hoehner, 736f; Best, 533; Lincoln, 368; O’Brien, 412; Bruce, 384; Thielman, 376]

v. 23 — PAUL PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR THE WIFE BEING SUBJECT TO HER HUSBAND — For the husband is head of the wife, — ὅτι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς [hoti ho anēr estin kephalē tēs gynaikos] — Verse 23 starts with [hoti] having the sense of ‘for,

because', giving the reason for the wife's submission to her husband: 'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife...'. Note Paul's reasoning here is based upon faith and religion, not on the Jewish old covenant nor some concession to the Graeco-Roman or Jewish cultures. Note as well it was the husband and not the father who was the head of the household; in Roman families the eldest male was the head which was not always the husband, or in some marriages ('sine manu' marriages) the wife's father still held the leadership over the wife (his daughter). Paul's teaching is based upon Scripture, Gen 2:24 says a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife and they become 'one flesh', the husband being the head of the new-family. Paul's teaching confronted the family structure of his day and was counter-cultural. [O'Brien, 412f; Best, 534; Arnold, 381; Hoehner, 740f; Thielman, 376; MacArthur, 288]

'HEAD' CONVEYS 'LEADERSHIP, AUTHORITY' — *"Now, for the first time, the husband's headship is stated as a fact, and made the basis of his wife's submission. The origin of this headship is not elaborated here, although in the fuller treatments of 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 and 1 Timothy 2:11-13 it is grounded in the order of creation, especially the narrative of Genesis 2 (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8,9)." [O'Brien, 413]* Up to the last fifty years virtually every commentator understood 'head' to carry the connotation of leadership and authority (see below for the modern interpretation preferred by some). This is of course a metaphor which Paul has already used twice in Ephesians (1:22; 4:15). In both of these previous references Paul uses the metaphor 'head' as part of a larger metaphor which includes the 'body' (1:23; 4:16). "In our discussion of each of those contexts, we established that *there is a dual notion of leadership and provision. Christ not only gives guidance, direction, and inspiration for his body, but he also provides strength, help, and sustenance for his people. This usage is consistent with how head-body imagery was used and understood in the ancient world (as illustrated in the medical writers, philosophers, and Jewish texts). It is therefore inappropriate to eliminate any notion of authority from the use of 'head' (κεφαλή [kephalē]) in this passage.*" [Arnold, 382] *"The head gives direction and the body responds. A physical body that does not respond to the direction of the head is crippled, paralyzed, or spastic. Likewise, a wife who does not properly respond to the direction of her husband manifests a serious spiritual dysfunction. On the other hand, a wife who willingly and lovingly responds to her husband's leadership as to the Lord is an honor to her Lord, her husband, her family, her church, and herself. She is also a beautiful testimony to the Lord before in view of the world around her."* [MacArthur, 288] *"[T]he husband's headship or authority, which the wife is to recognize, is one that is patterned on the unique character of Christ's headship over the Church, and, as the rest of the passage will make clear, that sort of headship included Christ's giving his life for the Church."* [Lincoln, 370] Moule brings out that Christ and His churches are 'one' with Christ as the leader, so the husband and wife are 'one flesh' (5:31) and the husband in this sacred union is the leader. [Moule, 138] But F. F. Bruce correctly points out that "when the husband is said to be head of the wife, it is not implied that the wife is his body. Even v. 29 does not say this." [Bruce, 385]

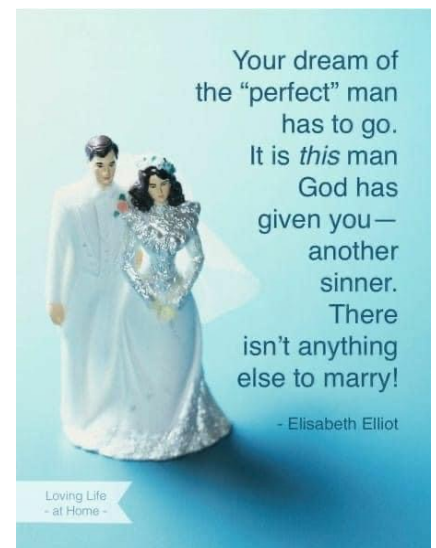
DOES 'HEAD' CONVEY 'LEADERSHIP, AUTHORITY' OR 'SOURCE'? — The metaphor 'head' has been extensively discussed and debated by scholars in recent years. According to Clinton Arnold, virtually every commentator understood 'head' to carry the connotation of leadership and authority until the 1970's / 1980's when a handful of interpreters began to contend the word did not convey any notion of authority. They based their position on a reassessment of a variety of passages in ancient literature *but it would be remiss to fail to notice how their findings coincide with the rise of the feminist movement in our culture.* Their new understanding of the metaphor was that of a 'source' such as a spring is the source of a stream, the 'head' of a stream. In

their view the husband would not be the ‘leader’ or ‘have authority’ but would be the ‘source’ of the wife, based upon the fact that since God created Eve from the side of Adam, Adam was the source of Eve. ***But what does that even mean? What was Paul trying to imply if the husband is the ‘source’ of the wife? How would this all correlate to ‘as Christ is head of the church’?***

The first response to those studies came from Wayne Grudem in 1985 (“Does Kephale Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples”). This was updated in 1991 to answer his critics in “Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism” (edited by Wayne Grudem along with John Piper). For example, Greek writers never used this word to convey the meaning of ‘source’ in an absolute sense such as ‘cows are the source of milk’ or ‘Egypt is the source of papyri.’ ***The absence of such usage explains why the most recent Greek lexicons do not even list ‘source’ as part of the semantic range of meaning for ‘head’ (such as BDAG).***

In a personal note with Mark Francois, Ph.D. in OT Theology, relating to an article of which he commented, he stated the following: “From what I can see, [the author in question] started off with the perspective that male leadership in the home or synagogue is wrong and developed his linguistic argument to support this presupposition. ***In other words, his interpretation seems to be driven by his ideology. This is very common when it comes to gender issues in the Bible. Rather than simply saying that they disagree with a particular biblical author (which would be the honest thing to do), a lot of people try to squeeze biblical authors into their own ideology. I’m sure we’re all guilty of this to one extent or another.***” Of the authors I am using in my studies in Ephesians, they almost universally agree that ‘source’ is not a proper understanding of ‘head’ in these passages we are considering: Clinton Arnold, 381f; Ernest Best, 535; Harold Hoehner, 739f; Peter O’Brien, 413f; Andrew Lincoln, 369; Frank Thielman, 377; F. F. Bruce, 384f. Hoehner also notes that ***both the preceding and succeeding verses state that the wife is to subject herself to her husband, along with the fact that in the context of the household code the issue is not ‘source’ but the lines of authority.*** [Hoehner, 739f]

THE HUSBAND IS HEAD OF THE WIFE IN THE SAME WAY THAT CHRIST IS HEAD OF HIS CHURCHES — as also Christ is head of the church; — ὥς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας [hōs kai ho Christos kephalē tēs ekklēsias] — Eph 5:23b begins with ὥς καὶ [hōs kai, ‘even as, as also’]. While this could be understood causally (‘the husband is head of his wife because Christ is head of His churches’), ***most understand this to be comparative with the sense of ‘in the same way that...’ (cf. 2:3; 1 Cor 9:5). Accepting this as comparative also has the added benefit of implying the husband’s headship is one of love and not oppression, love being the reason immediately given by Paul in the following verses of Christ’s leadership of His churches.*** However it would be incorrect to limit this phrase to have the force of ‘only in the same way that...’ which some might understand to have the husband’s headship limited by the way Christ exercised His headship. ‘Even as, as also’ rather simply serves to introduce the analogy of Christ and His churches. [Best, 535; Lincoln, 368; Hoehner, 738f; Thielman, 378; Moule, 138]



‘HE HIMSELF’ – EMPHATIC REFERENCE TO CHRIST ALONE — and He is the Savior of the body. — καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶν σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος [kai autos estin sōtēr tou sōmatos;] —

The nearest reference for ‘*himself*’ is ‘*Christ*’, not ‘*man, husband*’. This is almost universally understood to refer to Christ but there are those who believe it refers to both Christ and the husband (e.g., Church Fathers Chrysostom, Eusebius, and more recently Robinson, et. al.). This is rejected by most commentators for the following reasons: (1) if Paul would have meant both Christ and husbands, ‘*himself*’ would have been plural rather than singular; (2) the personal pronoun ‘*himself*’ is emphatic by its presence and position, therefore it must refer only to that which immediately precedes it (‘*Christ*’) emphasizing His exclusive work as Savior. Most translations attempt to bring forth this emphasis in some manner, e.g., ‘*He Himself being the Savior of the body*’ (NASB), ‘*and Christ is Himself the Savior of the church, his body*’ (TEV). H. C. G. Moule says the sense is as follows: ‘*He, emphatically, is to the Church what no earthly relationship can represent, its SAVIOUR.*’; (3) nowhere in the context is the wife viewed as the husband’s body in the same way as the church is Christ’s body. It is true the husband and wife are one flesh (5:31) and husband is to love his wife as his own body (5:28) but ‘*as his own body*’ still refers to the husband’s body, not the wife’s. Since the wife is not the husband’s body, this must refer back to Christ; (4) some bring forth 1 Cor 7:16, ‘*For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*’. But the context in 1 Cor 7 is that of evangelism with Paul telling the Corinthians that as a saved husband or wife, the Lord may use them to bring their unsaved spouse to salvation. In the Ephesian context both husband and wife are assumed to be believers. Furthermore in 1 Cor 7 the spouse is merely an instrument the Lord uses for the salvation of the other but the Savior is still Christ Himself; (5) the term ‘*savior*’ is used twenty-three times outside of this present context and always in reference to either Christ (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14) or God (Luke 1:47; 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 25) and never to human beings; (6) if the words did apply to the husband, in what way would the husband be the ‘*savior of the body*’; i.e., his wife? The husband’s role is not to save the wife from eternal separation as does Christ. At most it might imply that he is to provide for her daily need, enable her to fulfil her role of motherhood, or be her protector but none of this fits the passage nor does it go so far as to demand the title of ‘*Savior*’; (7) those who accept the Apocryphal books as authoritative suggests a parallel of Tobias’ marriage to his cousin Sarah to save her (Tob 6:18) but this is not valid because it was not Tobias who saved her but incense and prayer which saved them both from the demon (the incense made by the burning of the heart and liver of a fish!). [Hoehner, 741ff; Best, 535f; Lincoln, 370; O’Brien, 415; Arnold, 382; Moule, 139; Bruce, 385]

SAVIOR OF THE BODY — When Paul says ‘*Christ is the Savior of the body*’ he is reinforcing the concept of Christ as head of His churches, perhaps even a reminder of His ultimate authority, the One who rescued His people from eternal separation from God (Eph 2:1-10). Ernest Best calls this a ‘theological trailer’ for what will be developed in the following verses, adding it may also provide an explanation for His headship: He is Head because He is Savior. We will reserve further comment on this for a future lesson on His churches.



v. 24 — PAUL REITERATES HIS PREVIOUS COMMENTS — Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, — ἅλλ' ὡσπερ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ [all' hōsper hē ekklēsia hupotassetai tō Christō] — After what some consider to be a parenthetical statement in v. 23, Paul returns to his original flow of thought by repeating the ideas of v. 23b but reversed (v. 23 speaks of headship, v. 24 speaks of subjection), forming a chiastic pattern (abcba):

- A ²³ For the husband is head of the wife,
 B as also Christ is head of the church;
 C and He is the Savior of the body.
 B ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ,
 A so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

His parenthetical statement does not affect the thought of v. 24 but becomes important from v. 25 onwards. *As in v. 23, Christ's headship over His churches and our subordination to Him is taken for granted and used as a basis for the wives' subordination to their husbands.* [Best, 537; O'Brien, 415; Arnold, 382]

'BUT' ... — Paul begins v. 24 with what is typically used as an 'adversative,' 'but...' [ἀλλά, alla]. It is difficult to know exactly how Paul means to use the conjunction in relation to the previous clause as a glance at the translations will show: 'but' (RV, ASV, NASB, NEB, REB), 'now as' (NIV), 'therefore' (KJV), or left untranslated with the words that follow: 'just as' (NRSV), 'as' (RSV, Moffatt), 'now as' (NIV), 'and as' (TEV, JB, NJB), 'and so' (GNB). Some see the conjunction as resumptive of the previous clause, 'as also Christ is the head of the church' (v. 23) with v. 24 having the sense of 'consequently...'. *The majority of commentators regard it as adversative with Paul's statement of Christ being the Savior of the body, 'but notwithstanding this difference (or 'nevertheless') as the church submits to Christ...'. Paul would then be emphasizing that his comment in v. 23c relates only to Christ and that he was not teaching it was the husbands' responsibility "to serve as their wives' savior."* [Best, 537; Hoehner, 744; Arnold, 382; Lincoln, 372; O'Brien, 415f]

THESE RELATIONSHIPS WILL NEVER BE SERVILE NOR TYRANICAL — Paul speaks in v. 24a of Christ and His churches which, again, will be looked at in a future lesson. But



Sharon Lareau
@mrslareau

A wife who respects her husband and submits to him lives a daily testimony before her children if she is blessed to have them. When she explains to her children why she lives as she lives, she teaches that God is right, worthy of trust, and due obedience. [#Christianwife](#)

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important for us in our current topic is the fact that *as Christ's rule over His churches is never tyrannical (on the part of Christ) nor servile (for the churches). "The Church's subordination, then, means looking to its head for his beneficial rule, living by his norms, experiencing his presence and love, receiving from him gifts that will enable growth to maturity, and responding to him in gratitude and awe. It is such attitudes that the wife is being encouraged to develop in relation to her husband."* [Lincoln, 372] More on this later.

'SO ALSO...' — **so let the wives be to their own husbands** — οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν [houtōs kai hai gynaikeis tois idiois andrasin] — The second half of v. 24 is introduced by the adverbial

conjunction ‘so’ followed by the conjunction ‘and, also.’ *This introduces the pattern for the wife’s submission to her husband: she is to do so in a way that is similar to how the churches submit to Christ. This is slightly different from how Paul expressed it earlier (5:22b) where he tells the wife to submit to her husband ‘as she herself submits to the Lord.’* [Hoehner, 745; Arnold, 382f]

THE VERB IN v. 24b IS SUPPLIED FROM v. 24a — The latter part of v. 24 is parallel to the first, the relationship of husband and wife comparative to Christ and His churches. This parallelism is even more explicit because there is no verb in the latter clause and must be supplied from the first part of the verse. [Best, 538; Hoehner, 745; A. T. Robertson, Greek Grammar, 394; O’Brien, 416]

‘IN ALL THINGS’ — in everything. — ἐν παντί [en panti] — Most of what Paul says in this verse has already been touched upon, what Paul adds is where the commentators spend most of their time (and rightly so). *The wives are to be subject to their husbands, already mentioned; but to what extent are we to understand what Paul added, ‘in all things?’* A similar expression is used for children’s obedience to their parents (Col 3:20) and slaves to their masters (Col 3:22) but what about the wives? (Remember the context: whatever we conclude this to mean in relation to wives should be directly applicable to our churches and Christ.) I have read so many fine comments concerning Paul’s statement that rather than trying to combine their thoughts and probably just make a muddle of their words, I thought it best just to give some of their observations.

Harold Hoehner: *“It is difficult to know the precise meaning of this. It certainly would not mean that a wife should submit to her husband in anything that is contrary to the commands of God, for one needs to obey God more than humans (Acts 5:29). In other words, the wife is not to submit to her husband in anything sinful, including abuse. Having said this, most likely it refers to the full submission of wives to their husbands’ as the church is to submit to Christ. The impact of these words must not be minimized, for that would detract from the first part of the verse. In essence, the church is to submit to Christ in everything. As the church benefits from submission to Christ so also ought wives benefit from their submission to their husbands. In conclusion, there are two words of caution. First, there is no indication that a wife’s submission is to be based on the degree to which her husband demonstrates his love. In fact, it is very likely that some husbands did not respond to the gospel and see no need to be loving, yet the Christian*

wife is responsible before the Lord to submit to her husband whether or not he is a believer. Second, her submission is to be of her own accord in obedience to the Lord (5:22), not by the demand of her husband. As will be demonstrated next, the demands on husbands in the next verses are clearly as great, if not greater, than the injunction to wives.” [Hoehner, 745f]



Angela Mitchell
@raisingapologists
We can't cry foul when God has given us a feast of roles in building His church. Who is the clay to condemn the creators design? Women go and serve in the way He created women to do so. Be glad and rejoice. He didn't have to choose you at all.

Peter O’Brien: “Although this phrase has raised modern questions about the limitations of a wife’s submission to her husband (arising out of the contemporary desire to control the scope of someone’s authority, specifying what decisions a person in authority can make), ‘in everything’ indicates that the wife is to be subordinate to her husband in every area of life. In this sense it is

all-encompassing, and is not, as some have suggested, restricted to sexual matters or some other special sphere of their relationship. ‘No part of her life should be outside of her relationship to her husband and outside of subordination to him’. Just as the church is to submit to Christ in everything, so in every sphere wives are expected to submit to their husbands. The motivation for doing this is a true and godly reverence for Christ (5:21; cf. v. 33).

“Furthermore, the exhortation to be subordinate ‘in everything’ should be read within the flow of the argument in the chapter. By God’s design husband and wife are ‘one flesh’ (v. 31; Gen. 2:24), and the divine intention is that they should ‘function together under one head, not as two autonomous individuals living together’. This subordination of wife to husband ‘has a practical aspect in that it creates a greater effectiveness in their working together as one’. And it anticipates God’s ultimate intention of bringing back all things into unity in Christ (1:10).

“The question, then, as to whether the wife is to submit to her husband regardless of what he commands is not addressed. But the words ‘in everything’, however they are interpreted, are not intended to reverse the instructions and exhortations already laid upon all believers in the paraenesis of Ephesians 4-6. This admonition to wives in the household table cannot be interpreted as a kind of grid through which all the earlier exhortations are filtered in the interests of serving the husband’s authority. (Karl Barth, 620-21, points out that ‘in everything’ cannot mean mere blind obedience, especially when it would mean acting contrary to God’s commands. On the other hand, it is inappropriate to ‘compil[e] a short or long list of exemptions to prove that “in everything” actually means “not in everything”’ (621)!) Further, it goes without saying that wives are not to be subordinate in matters that are sinful or contrary to God’s commands (cf. Acts 5:29).

“There is no suggestion that this exhortation to be submissive is intended to stifle the wife’s thinking or acting. She should not act unilaterally, but rather submit willingly to her husband’s leadership. ‘Just as the church should willingly submit to Christ in all things and, if it does so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying of growth and freedom, so also wives should willingly submit to their husbands in all things and, if they do so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying’. As with the other admonitions in the household table, God sets forth these instructions for our good.

“Accordingly, the wife’s submission to her husband is not conditional on his loving her after the pattern of Christ’s love or showing his unceasing care for her. Later the apostle will make it clear that husbands are not to rule their wives insensitively (vv 25-27). Those in authority should not ‘lord it over’ those who are led (2 Cor. 1:24). But the wife’s response of submission, which is not an unthinking obedience to his leadership, is to be rendered gladly, irrespective of whether the husband will heed the injunctions explicitly addressed to him or not. Contrary to much contemporary Western thinking, there is no suggestion that wives are to be submissive to their husbands only if their husbands are loving. We have already seen that the church’s submission to Christ leads to blessing, growth, and unity for God’s people. Similarly, the wife’s submission to her husband, as she seeks to honour the Lord Jesus Christ, will ultimately lead to divine blessing for herself and others.” [O’Brien, 417f]

Andrew Lincoln: “There is to be no limit to the submission expected of wives, just as there is no limit to the Church’s obedient service of Christ. In this ideal picture of Christian marriage, the possibility is not even considered that wives’ submission to their husbands might conflict with their submission to Christ. On the other hand, it must be said that in Ephesians the Church’s submission to Christ is for the Church’s benefit, enabling its growth, unity, and maturity, so that

the wife's subordination to her husband also presupposes that it is part of a relationship in which the husband has her welfare constantly in view. As the following verses will make explicit, full and complete commitment of the husband to his particular role of loving is also required (Miletic, 'One Flesh,' 105, 'subordination is to selfless love – expressed through the husband's headship – and not to the whims of the husband'). So in [Paul's] vision of Christian marriage what is called for from wives is complete subordination to complete love (cf. also Miletic, 'One Flesh,' 111, 'both roles demand total self-renunciation')." [Lincoln, 373]

Frank Thielman: *"The phrase ['in everything'], particularly in a text as effusive in its language as Ephesians, is not intended to be taken woodenly to mean 'in everything no matter how harmful, silly, or sinful.' When Paul tells the Corinthians that he was 'oppressed in every way' in 2 Cor. 4:8 and 7:5, he does not mean that he bore every known affliction but that he faced much trouble (cf. 2 Cor. 9:8, 11; 11:6). So here he would assume that his readers understood the expansive nature of his language, appreciate the general point, and make exceptions in the hard cases where necessary....* Paul probably would have thought that when difficult situations arose, wives should use their discernment in 'find[ing] out what is pleasing to the Lord' (5:10) and in doing it, although that might mean noncompliance with their husband's wishes. This is assumed, however, and is not where the emphasis lies. The rhetorical force of ['in everything'] is focused on the importance of the wife's submission to the husband. When the situation is not complicated by ignorant or immoral behavior, the wife should voluntarily submit to the leadership of her husband." [Thielman, 380f]

Ernest Best: "The final phrase, [en panti, 'in all things'], requires explanation and perhaps qualification. *It seems an obvious implication from v. 24a and would appear to put the husband on a level with God who must be obeyed in everything. Yet husbands are not sinless and perfect as was Christ.* In so far as [Paul] treats only Christian households, he is able to eliminate the possibility of the wife's disobedience should the husband order her to sacrifice to the household gods or to perform any other act which would conflict with her faith. *[Paul] appears to assume that Christian husbands would never ask their Christian wives to act sinfully. Yet even within a Christian household it would be foolish to say husbands know how everything should be done.* When it came to the time to wean a baby probably most wives went their own way, and did not seek guidance from their husbands (what did he know about such things?). Contemporary society may have given a leading role to husbands yet in practice there would always have been areas where they did not interfere, or if they did their advice was not heeded. In much of the Greco-Roman world wives were expected to manage the internal affairs of the household." [Best, 538]