

Ephesians 5:22-33

Ephesians 5:22-33 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 Saviour of the body. (24) Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (26) that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, (27) that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (28) So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. (30) For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (31) "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (32) This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (33) Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Questions On The Text

How are wives to relate to their husbands?

Verse 22: This would be one of the most abused verses in the entire Bible so it is worth looking at in some detail. Wives are to be submissive (subordinate) to their husbands. Several things need to be noted. First, God expects wives to voluntarily subject themselves to their husband's authority.

Second, this command is not addressed to the husband, but to the wife. It is not the husband's role to force or badger his wife into submission. Third, the previous verse makes it clear that the husband is also to have a humble and submissive attitude towards his wife.

Fourth, the wife's submission is to be "as to the Lord." This implies responsibilities on both sides. On her part, the wife should view her submission to her husband as submission to the Lord. The husband, on the other hand, has an implied responsibility to behave like the Lord. This means that in the exercise of his authority he should a) never be selfish, b) never expect his wife to do something wrong, and c) always be looking out for her best interests.

As we will see in the following verses, the focus of this passage of Scripture is on the husband's responsibilities rather than the wife's.

Why are wives to submit to their husbands?

Verse 23: Wives are to submit to their husbands because the husband is the "head" of the wife, a position of leadership and authority. This indicates the roles of husbands and wives in relation to each other and not their relative value in the sight of God. Their equality of value before God is clearly stated in Galatians 3:28.

The headship of the husband is likened to the headship of Christ over the church. As the Saviour of the body, His headship was expressed through His self-sacrifice on the cross.

How are wives to submit to their husbands?

Verse 24: Wives are to submit in everything. Clearly this must be taken in the overall context of Scripture so that no wife could be expected to obey a husband who requires her to disobey God (see Acts 4:19-20). The fact that this relationship of wifely submission is likened to the submission of the church to Christ means that it is not mere cultural expectation.

However, when the church submits to Christ it is submitting to selfless love. This picture of submission is not a one-way street. Any husband who, based on these verses, demands total obedience from his wife would do well to remember that he has the greater responsibility of demonstrating towards his wife the same sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated to the church.

What is the husband's responsibility to his wife?

Verse 25: Husbands are to love their wives according to the example of Christ who loved the church and gave His life for her.

What was the purpose of Christ's death?

Verses 26-27: The reason Christ died is that He might sanctify the church. To "sanctify" means to "set apart" meaning that the church has been set apart for God's use. Christ also died so that the church could be cleansed from guilt.

Paul relates cleansing to the "washing of water by the word." The water is a reference to water baptism which means that the word is likely to be the word of confession of faith in Christ spoken by the person being baptised. See also 1 Peter 3:21 where the word "answer" can also be translated "pledge" referring to a person's baptismal pledge to follow Christ.

Finally, the purpose of Christ's death is that He might present to Himself a church that is glorious; without spot, wrinkle, or blemish; and holy.

How should husbands love their wives?

Verses 28-29: A husband should love his wife in the same way as he would love his own body (see Matthew 22:39). Since, in Genesis 2:21-24, a husband is viewed to be one with his wife, it makes good sense that if he loves his wife, he loves himself. He should therefore care for her just as he would nourish and cherish his own body. No one, under normal circumstances, hates his own body.

How does the church relate to Christ?

Verses 30-33: Quoting Genesis 2:24 and almost quoting Genesis 2:23 (there are subtle, but significant, changes), Paul now sums up this passage of Scripture. The relationship of Christ to the church is the pattern for the husband and wife relationship. As the church, we are members of Christ's body. And husbands ought to love their wives, while wives should respect their husbands.

Further Questions For Discussion:

How should wives behave towards their husbands?

Why should wives submit to their husbands? Is this a cultural expectation?

How can a husband demonstrate selfless love towards his wife?

What does the word "sanctify" mean in relation to the church?

What does it mean for a husband to love his wife as his own body?

How is Christ's relationship to the church a pattern for husband-wife relationships?