

Ephesians 5 (Part 3): 22-33 • The Role of the Wife

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And we are in Ephesians, Chapter 5, so open your Bibles there, please. Ephesians Chapter 5. I told you last week that we are going to meddle today. And we are. We are going to be talking about marriage for the next couple of weeks, actually, and talking about the roles of husband and wife.

You can start squirming. I am going to actually start here in verse 22, and I am going to read through the end of the chapter, and then this is going to be Part 1 of this section. But, it says: *“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.*

“²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their 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 Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

“³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Stop there. Let's pray. Thank you, Father God, for giving us time to gather this morning in your name, and it is in Your name that we come with a desire to learn and to grow in understanding. And we pray for Your Holy Spirit to open each and every heart.

We pray, Lord God, that You would fill us with insight and understanding from the Scriptures. And Lord, we pray that You would also heal some of our misconceptions. We pray that You would help give us the tools that we need to

understand your word and to walk it out. We thank You, Father, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

One thing we have to remember as we go into these verses is that the Apostle Paul has been exhorting us to walk out the reality of who we are in Jesus. You heard me talk about this last week. The first three chapters of Ephesians are all about who we are in the Lord. It is talking about our blessings in Christ.

And then the last 3 chapters of the book are all about how to walk it out and the encouragement to walk it out. And of course, that is certainly the case when it comes to living together as husbands and wives. We are to walk out the same reality of who we are in Jesus. And the apostle begins here by addressing wives.

That is going to be the focus of our time here this morning. I want you to know ahead of time that it was my total intention to do husbands and wives together today. But as I began to look at this thing, there was just so much to say to the women. I'm going to get in trouble for that. Anyway, so we are going to do the women today, and we are going to do the husbands next week.

But the Apostle begins here by saying in verse 22, *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”* And then he explains why in 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.”*

And here, in these first 2 verses, we are introduced to the idea of headship. And I will tell you that headship is not just a biblical term at all. It is also used in secular circles. And the definition of headship is just what you would expect.

Let me put it up on the screen for you:

headship

• noun •

the position of a leader

It is a noun. It means, the position of a leader. And we learn in these verses about this headship, as it relates to marriage, that God ordained the husband to be the head in the relationship. Don't ask me why. And I am serious about that. I have no clue. I can give you biblical clues, I suppose.

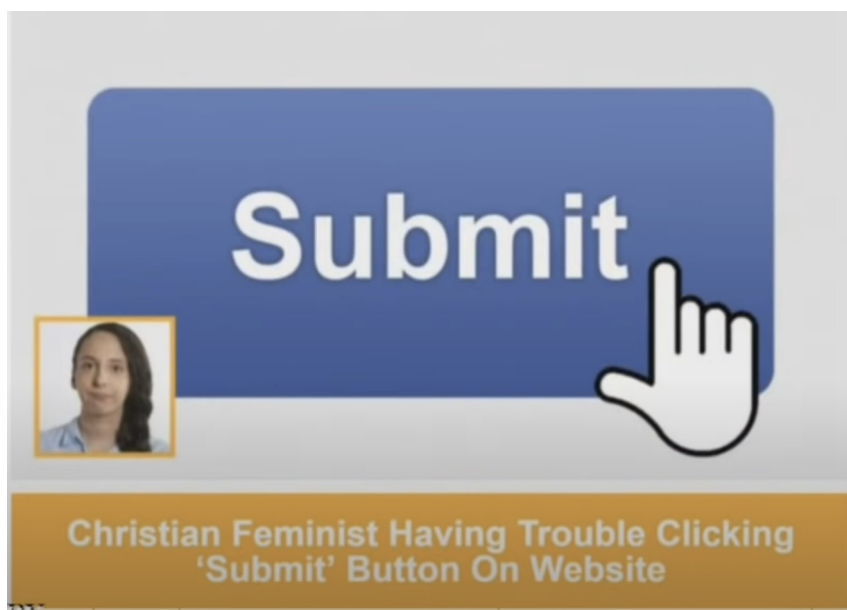
But the fact of the matter is, I find personally that women are probably a little more qualified in a lot of respects to lead. I grew up in a home with a very

strong maternal leadership example. My mother was a very strong leader. The woman that I married is not the kind of woman who just sits around going, yes, Dear. I mean, she is a strong leader in her own right, and I'm not bothered by that. In fact, I appreciate it very much, and I see often in these women great leadership qualities that eclipse my own.

But the fact of the matter is, the husband has been ordained by God to be the head in the home. Paul says once again in verse 23, *"the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church."* Now before we talk about how all this applies to marriage— and we will talk about it— let me address the elephant in the room. And that is the fact that we don't like to submit. We don't like even to hear the word submit.

And if you want to get people going, just bring it up in mixed company. Start talking about submission in marriage and things like that, and you are guaranteed to start causing fireworks. And everybody knows that we don't like to submit. We don't like to submit really in any particular way, but marriage is certainly one of them. I don't know how many of you subscribe to the Babylon Bee. Some of you have probably never heard of it.

It is kind of an online Christian satire thing, and a lot of the stuff that they share is probably a little over the top. But about a week ago— and they do these in the form of news stories like you'd see if you get online to read the news— and there was one was clever and I put it, I have it here for you. It says,



Christian Feminist Having Trouble Clicking 'Submit' Button on Website.

Yeah, that's what I thought. Any kind of submission is distasteful to us. It's funny, whenever the government changes the speed limit or whatever it is, it is never, of course, fast enough. They tell us that we have to go 70 miles an hour on the freeway, and immediately we bristle, and we go faster anyway.

I'm a motorcyclist, and have been pretty much all my life, and I've noticed that different states have different laws regarding, like, requiring helmets. And in those states where a helmet is required you see that people driving through those will go out and buy the smallest possible helmet that they can find to just get in under the law that they can get away with.

And again the reason for things like that, our responses, is that we don't like to submit. And we can argue all day long about whether a law is good or bad or useful or stupid, but in the end, we just don't want people telling us how to live. We don't like people telling us what to do.

And many times we will just come out and say it. You even hear kids saying things like, you're not the boss of me, or something like that. And then we get a little bit older and it's like, Who died and left you in charge? or something like that. We just don't like it.

I don't like— I don't want — people telling me what to do. And yet the fact of the matter is, in every well-ordered society, we find these issues, or these, what are referred to as pillars, supporting pillars of ordered society, and they are authority and submission. We don't like it, but we know that it is there, and we understand that it probably even has to be there for us not to devolve into chaos.

As long as these things have existed, we have resisted them. In fact, the rejection or resistance of authority is one of the hallmarks of what the Bible refers to as godless and sinless, sinful people. Let me show you a passage from Jude. This is an interesting passage on the screen. Jude writes with this warning. He says:

Jude 1:4,8 (NIV)

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. ...these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings.

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. (And then he says) They are godless men, who change

the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Look what he goes on to say) ...these dreamers pollute their own bodies, (There's the warning. One of the characteristics of these godless men is that they) reject authority and slander celestial beings.

And yet on the flip side, we know that God has established His kingdom with this very idea. Check out 1 Corinthians, look at this. Chapter 11.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV)

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

But I want you to understand (Paul writes) that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

And that is an interesting passage. I want you to take note of that because it says that within the context of God's kingdom, even Jesus has chosen to submit. He does not submit because of his inferiority. He has chosen to submit within the context of God's order and His kingdom.

Paul is talking about marriage here in Ephesians, chapter 5, and how this idea of authority and submission comes into play. And we know from experience that it doesn't come into play very easily. In fact, it is a very challenging one. It creates a challenge every single day for married couples. As someone who has been married for 40 years, it has been a challenge, I can tell you.

And I know that I'm not alone here regarding that. We all know how the world deals with the idea of authority and submission in marriage. They just ignore it. Or first they ridicule it, and then they ignore it. But then just a quick look at the divorce rate tells us how smart that is.

Something is not right here. Something has to change. Maybe what we need to do is, we need to stop for a minute and take a good look at what the Bible is saying here. And challenge and question some of our preconceived ideas and notions and see if maybe we have been missing something. We need to start by realizing one very important thing, and that is that marriage is God's idea, not man's.

Mankind did not just at some point decide that marriage would be kind of fun. Why don't we just do this sort of thing where —and we'll call it marriage. No, this was God's institution and as the creator of marriage, He might just know best how it works. You think? Yeah, but we have questions.

There are always a lot of questions. One of the first questions that comes up when we read passages like this where it says, “*Wives, submit to your own husbands,*”—and I’m going to put these questions on the screen here— is, first of all:

What does it mean to submit?

What does it mean to submit?

What exactly does that mean? And that is a great question to ask, because I find that, when most people read Ephesians 5:22, they interpret it within the context of their own assumptions and definitions. And it is usually quite negative. And so they will read this verse, and they will just immediately go, well that’s, yeah, old, weird, outdated garbage. And there is nothing that is relevant to your life and my life today.

That is an assumption based on what we think it means to submit. I started looking around, and I found what I believe is a beautiful definition of biblical submission. I want to share it with you on the screen. Check this out:

“Biblical submission in marriage is the disposition to follow a husband’s authority and a loving response to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don’t flourish when you are passive and when I have to make sure the family works.”

“Biblical submission in marriage is the disposition to follow a husband’s authority and a loving response to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don’t flourish when you are passive and when I have to make sure the family works.”

Isn’t that a great definition? It is a loving response by a woman to respond to her husband to say, I like it when you lead. I like it when you take responsibility. I like it when you’re out in front. And you’re taking serious the needs of the family.

Now the second question that arises about biblical submission is the next one we will put on the screen, which is:

Why should a wife submit to her husband?

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And the reason for that is given in verse 23. We have already read it a few times here, but again, verse 23 says, *“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”*

What Paul is saying in this verse, is that the husband has received his role of leadership from the Lord. And that means he didn't take it upon himself; it was given to him. He was ordained to that role. Most of the men that I talk to would rather not be in that role. They many times find it intimidating and difficult.

And it can be those things. But the fact of the matter is, they are there because God put them there, not because they asked to be there, or even wanted to be there. The Lord made the man that position of head in the family, and that presents a wife with what I believe is the most important reason to submit to her husband. That is because she understands it is God's plan for marriage, and she trusts God's plan even more than she trusts her own reason or understanding related to that sort of thing.

And here is how Paul put it in verse 24. Look with me again in your Bible. *“Now as the church submits to Christ, (in other words, as we, the body of Christ, submit to our head, which is Jesus) so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”* And that brings up the third question that we want to put up on the screen, which is:

<i>What does biblical submission look like?</i>

What does biblical submission look like?

I think the best and most descriptive word is the one that is found at the very end of this chapter. Look with me in verse 33. Skip all the way down in your Bible to the last verse of the chapter, which says: *“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, (and look at this) and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”* And I think the word, respect sums up the answer to that question of what does submission look like?

I remember a number of years ago when I was meeting with a couple doing some marriage counseling, and we were going over these passages. I was talking to her about her role by God to submit, and we started talking about what that means. We talked about the respect that goes along with that, and she spoke up very quickly and said, “well then, we have a problem here.” And I said, “Why?” She said, “Because I don't respect him.” And I understand that.

But she misunderstood. She misunderstood the fundamental aspect of what God's Word was saying to her. She confused the idea of showing respect with feeling respect toward an individual. And because she didn't feel that her husband was worthy of respect, she didn't show him any respect and felt that there was no need to respect him.

But God isn't telling the wife here to judge whether her husband is respectable. What the Lord is telling a woman to do in this case, is to show respect to her husband by virtue of his God-given role. In other words, God is challenging a woman to respect Himself –God– by showing that respect to the man that He has chosen to lead that family.

And I believe that respect is the one need that a man has within the context of marriage that is his greatest. Doesn't mean that he doesn't need other things. He needs love. He needs understanding. He needs all the other things that human beings need. But in a marriage, in the context of marriage, I believe that there is nothing greater that a wife can do for her husband than to show him respect.

Now, before we go any further, I want to take a moment to talk about what submission does not mean. And so we are going to put that up as a heading here, and I'm going to give you 5 pretty rapid-fire points here, bullet points of:

What submission does NOT mean:

1. *Submission does not mean agreeing with your husband about everything.*

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It doesn't mean that you are forced into a position of agreeing. Every married couple knows that men and women think very differently about things, and there are many times that we clearly disagree. However, Biblical submission on the part of the wife means that in your disagreement, you don't resort to disrespectful and demeaning language or attitudes.

You see? So, a woman is free to disagree. But she needs to do it respectfully. Rather than to respond to him in a belittling or demeaning sort of way, her response needs to be respectful. Number 2:

What submission does NOT mean:

1. *Submission does not mean agreeing with your husband about everything.*
2. *Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.*

Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.

Submission is not promising at the altar that you are never going to think for yourself again. However, it is about learning to voice your thoughts and ideas with respect in a way that honors your husband's role of leadership. Thirdly,

What submission does NOT mean:

- 1. Submission does not mean agreeing with your husband about everything.*
- 2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.*
- 3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to influence your husband.*

Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to influence your husband.

Now I want to be careful about how I say this. I have noticed over the years doing marriage counseling, that often what happens: two people fall in love, and they decide to get married, and then after the honeymoon is over, they spend the rest of their married lives trying to change one another.

And what I mean by that is, the man does his level-best to try to get his wife to think like him. And the woman is constantly attempting to get her husband to think like a woman. And it is an exercise in futility. It is never going to happen. Try as you may, it is not going to happen. In fact, the diversity of who we are and how we think is one of the things that can make marriage delightful.

Now, having said that, there may be times when a woman sees a situation going on in her marriage and she understands that there is a need to influence her husband as far as how he is thinking about the situation or whatever. And women are very good at seeing problems. They're very adept.

They're noticers. Men don't notice things nearly as much, but women notice things. And when they see a situation that is problematic, and there are obviously different ways they can approach their husband about it. And when a wife responds to her husband with disrespectful words and attitudes, what happens in your marriage?

It just makes things worse, doesn't it? It doesn't make it better. Instead, when a woman understands that, maybe the family is headed in the wrong direction, and she needs to influence her husband. She needs to speak to him with words of grace, words of respect, and also speak by her actions. And we will talk more about that in a little bit. Fourthly:

What submission does NOT mean:

4. Submission does not mean putting the will of your husband before the Word of God.

Submission does not mean putting the will of your husband before the Word of God.

This is a very important thing to understand. When a husband is clearly on a path of unbelief or disobedience, a woman is under no obligation to put his will above the clear instruction of God's Word. A woman is first and foremost a follower of Jesus Christ. Very important that women understand that. And then number 5:

What submission does NOT mean:

4. Submission does not mean putting the will of your husband before the will of Christ.

5. Submission does not mean that a wife is to respond out of fear.

Submission does not mean that a wife is to respond out of fear.

It is important, ladies, that you know that the role of head is not the same as dictator. And any husband who bullies or dominates his wife through fear or intimidation is guilty of the worst kind of abuse and knows nothing of what it means to be a godly husband.

Once again, Biblical submission on the part of the wife is a response, a willing response of love. And, by the way, may I also say, men, maybe take a moment just to say, I believe it is completely inappropriate for a husband to say to his wife, you are to submit. Because it is to be a volitional act on her part. It is a response of love, meaning her love for him and the recognition of his love for her. And so, men, please understand something. There are two sides to this coin. If your wife isn't submitting the way you think she should, maybe you need to look in the mirror and find out if your leadership is a loving, gracious, and kind headship and leadership in the home that makes it easy for her to submit.

A man ought to make it easy for his wife to submit and to respond with respect to him. Final question that I want to put up on the screen here.

What should a woman do if her husband is neglecting or rejecting his role as head?

What should a woman do if her husband is neglecting or rejecting his role as head?

Now I know that some of the ladies, even some of the women in this fellowship, are married to unbelievers. It presents a very difficult situation. First question I get is, Is he still the head in our home if he is not a believer? And the answer is, absolutely. He is still the head. And how to respond to a husband who is either an unbeliever or who is stumbling over some aspect of God's Word is a very challenging question, but it is one that the Apostle Peter addressed in his first letter. Let me put this on the screen for you. It says:

1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV)

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that if some do not obey the word, (and again, that could apply to an unbeliever, or a believer who is simply being disobedient. He says,) they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct”

In other words, when they see you respecting them and the purity of your conduct toward the Lord.

This means, women, that as you walk in obedience to Jesus, Your conduct, your actions, your life is to speak to your husband who is in a position of disobedience. It is not appropriate for a woman to instruct her husband about areas of disobedience in his life.

And I'm telling you, it will never go well. He is in a position of headship even if he is an unbeliever. If he is walking in disobedience, it is between him and the Lord. Ladies, you live for Jesus. You walk with Jesus with all of your heart. And let him see through your respect of him and your purity before the Lord the things that he needs.

You know, I share with couples who are getting married when we go through pre marriage counseling, that women often don't understand how significantly they can affect their husbands simply by their actions. You know, and I share an example of what I mean by that by saying, if we ever get up in the morning – Sue and I– and she sees that I'm not opening my Bible like I should in the morning– maybe I'm not spending my devotional time like I should– I just get up right away and turn on my computer, or something like that, or get busy

doing something else. She could say something to me, I suppose, but that is probably not going to go over very well. The best thing for her to do is to snuggle up in her favorite chair and open her Bible.

And let me walk by and see that. That speaks volumes to see my wife's devotion. To see her love for the Lord. And then it is the Holy Spirit that brings conviction into my life. And I'm thinking to myself, That is what I need to be doing. All this other stuff can wait. I'm going to go grab my Bible and sit down.

Now, your husband might not respond that way. I might not even respond that way right away. The point is, it is just too easy to give in to the temptation to say, Don't you think you should be reading your Bible this morning? Boy, that Bible, I think I can write my name on the cover in the dust. Or something that's snarky or a little bit, and we think we're doing him a favor. Well, you're not. And again, it is not going to go over well. Because a woman at that point puts herself in the position of instruction. And Paul says in the scripture, I do not allow a woman to teach a man. Why? It is a reversal of his position as head, and it puts the man in a position of submission.

And ladies, you don't want him there. You don't want your husband in a position of submission in your family. You don't want him to be submitted to you. He needs to be submitted, certainly. There are people he must submit to. But it is not you, because your marriage relationship is going to become inverted.

And your husband is going to be more like your little boy. And you don't want to be married to your son. Believe me. You want to be married to a man who is going to be a leader. A godly, strong leader. And it is very important that women understand how important their actions can be in conveying things to their husband.

I want to end here with –I think– one of the most powerful passages in the Bible on submission that you are going to find in the scripture. Let me show you this. It is from Philippians, Chapter 2. And this is another passage I use in pre-marriage counseling, but it says:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (which means held on to,) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Now, some of you might be wondering why I read that passage for you in the context of marriage and the submission of wives. Because, I have to tell you honestly, this passage was not written just for wives. Philippians, Chapter 2 was written for all of us. And, it is a powerful passage. But I believe it is also a wonderful example of what a woman is called to do. And that is to willingly subordinate herself to her husband.

And why? Take a look at this passage. I believe that there are some things that, if women will meditate on this, will give them great insight. *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider that equality something to be held on to.”*

You see, that is the reason I think this passage is so applicable to women in their particular situation in marriage, because, ladies, you are equal to your husband. As far as the Bible is concerned, the Bible says there is no difference between Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave or free (Galatians 3:27-28). It doesn't matter.

Within the context of God's economy those differences don't exist. Women, you are equal to your husband. The question of equality is not even a question. It is a non-question. If we are getting rid of Biblical submission because we believe women should be equal, you are fighting for the wrong cause because we have always believed that women were equal from a Biblical standpoint.

I am not saying everybody in the Bible even ever believed that, but the Bible declares it. Women, you are equal. Now, can we put that passage back on the screen? I want to refer to that a few more times.

Once again, the statement here is, *“Your attitude should be the same of that as Christ: Who being in very nature God, (in other words, being equal with God the Father) did not consider that equality something to be grasped (held on to, but rather released that aspect of subordination, look at what it goes on to say, making) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”* Who? Who caused Jesus to subordinate himself to the Father? Nobody. Nobody did.

It says in this passage, He “*made himself nothing.*” Ladies, that is why this passage applies very closely to you in marriage, because, once again, men are never to ask a woman to submit. She is called by God to do it. It is to be a response to her Savior, not to her husband. Specifically telling her, “You need to submit...” No. Just as Jesus made himself nothing, a woman is to respond out of her own willing attitude to submit to her husband. And then it goes on to say, He took “*the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*” and so on and so forth, and “*he humbled himself.*”

It can be a very humbling situation to put yourself in a position of subordination. I get that. We all have to subordinate ourselves to somebody, even if it is the legal authorities when I'm driving down the road, and there is a car behind me with the lights flashing. I am subordinate to that authority, and I submit to that authority, and I pull off to the side of the road, whether he just wants to get past me, or stop and talk to me. I am going to submit to that. We all have to do it.

It can be a humbling situation to do it. but we are all called to do it. And so this passage in Philippians is such a beautiful passage, particularly for women, although it should be applied to all of us, but for women because it helps a woman to understand Jesus is your example.

We are going to talk next week about how Jesus is the example for men in the loving of their wives, but He is no less an example for women. Listen, ladies, Jesus doesn't ask you to do anything He hasn't been willing to do Himself. And Philippians, Chapter 2 shows you that. Now we have only looked at one side of the equation, and I am telling you right now that if you don't come back and listen next week, it is going to be lopsided.

That is the thing that bothers people, when we talk about submission. You really can't talk about Biblical submission and the role of the wife without addressing the role of the man. Without putting the role of the man in there, it is slavery. It looks very much like slavery and domination that we are asking a woman to live with, and that is not what is going on here.

And when we talk next week, you are going to see that the requirements upon a husband are incredibly high in his role of leadership and in the way he is to respond to his wife in order to make her willingly desire to submit.