

Does the Bible really say wives need to submit to their husband?

Ephesians 5:21-24

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

Colossians 3:18-24

Instructions for Christian Households

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

How do you feel when you read these verses? What do you think submission means? Looks like?

A call for **all** believers to submit to one another as they imitate the submission of Christ:

Philippians 2:1-11

Have the Attitude of Christ

1Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? **2**Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. **4**Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

7Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
8he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

9Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,

10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shine Brightly for Christ

12Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. **13**For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

14Do everything without complaining and arguing, **15**so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. **16**Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. **17**But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy.

Ephesians 4

Unity in the Body

1Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. **2**Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. **3**Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. **4**For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. **5**There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6**and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.

7However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. **8**That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

9Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. **10**And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

11Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **12**Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **13**This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. **15**Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. **16**He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Living as Children of Light

17With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. **18**Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. **19**They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

20But that isn't what you learned about Christ. **21**Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, **22**throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. **23**Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. **24**Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

25So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. **26**And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27**for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

28If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. **29**Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

30And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

31Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. **32**Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Colossians 3

Living the New Life

1Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. **2**Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. **3**For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. **4**And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

5So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. **6**Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. **7**You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. **8**But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. **9**Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. **10**Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. **11**In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

12Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. **13**Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. **14**Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. **15**And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. **17**And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

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20Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. **21**Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

22Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. **23**Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. **24**Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. **25**But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites.

The upside down kingdom of Jesus:

Mark 8:35 - If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.

Mark 9:35 - He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

Luke 6:38 - Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full--pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."

Acts 20:35 - You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Galatians 3:28 - There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 5:1, 13-15 - So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

1 Corinthians 9:19 - Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:12 - You say, "I am allowed to do anything"--but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

Ephesians 4:21 - And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1 Peter 5:5 - In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Paradox

The life and teachings of Christ were often couched in paradox. Paradoxes, of course, are only apparent contradictions, not real ones. Their truth is often discovered by maintaining a tension between two opposite lines of teaching. Although both teachings may contain elements of truth, the instant we emphasize one to the exclusion of the other, the truth becomes distorted and disfigured. (Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*)

The good and trustworthy heart of God

John 10:10 - The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Our ability to submit to God is proportionate to our ability to trust God. If the call to lay down your life for the sake of Christ meets a brick wall in your heart, perhaps it would be wise to ask God to expose anything that is in the way of you trusting Him.

So why is submissions specifically addressed to women if it is a universal call to all Christians?

“The Discipline of submission has been terribly misconstrued and abused from failure to see this wider context. Submission is an ethical theme that runs the gamut of the New Testament. It is a posture obligatory upon all Christians: men as well as women, fathers as well as children, masters as well as slaves. We are commanded to live a life of submission because Jesus lived a life of submission, not because we are in a particular place or station in life. Self-denial is a posture fitting for all those who follow the crucified Lord. Everywhere in the (New Testament teachings on rules for the Christian household) the one and only compelling reason for submission is the example of Jesus.” (Richard Foster, *“Celebration of Discipline”*)

“The (letters of Paul) first call to subordination those who, by virtue of the given culture, are already subordinate. (Wives, children, slaves) The revolutionary thing about this teaching is that these people, to whom first-century culture afforded no choice at all, are addressed as free moral agents. Paul gave personal moral responsibility to those who had not legal or moral status in their culture. He made decision-makers of people who were forbidden to make decisions. The only meaningful reason for such a command was the fact that by virtue of the gospel message they had come to see themselves as free from a subordinate status in society. Paul urged voluntary subordination not because it was their station in life, but because it was ‘fitting in the Lord’ (Col. 3:18).” (Richard Foster, *“Celebration of Discipline”*)

What submission is:

- Godly submission will reflect a humble, gentle, patient, compassionate, kind spirit. (Eh. 4:2-4, Col. 3:12)
- Godly submission will reflect a number of different leadership styles, personalities and God languages.
- Godly submission will consider the interest of others. (Phil. 2:4)
- Godly submission resists a complaining and critical spirit. (Prov. 21:9-19, Phil. 2:14)
- Godly submission is a response to an invitation to give up our lives, so that we can gain the life God has for us. It is a call to selfless living. It is a hard call, but it is a good call.

What submission is not:

- It is not a “one-size-fits-all” mold. Godly submission will look different for each person.
- It is not a formula. Scripture rarely gives us formulas. We are to lean on the Holy Spirit who was given to us at our conversion, that we might know how God is leading us to lay down our life for one another.
- It is not an excuse for one person to impose their will on another. Godly submission is not about being under the control of someone else. (This is a good place to mention that there are cases of abuse which can deeply confuse this issue and teaching. If you question whether or not your relationship is crossing over the line from healthy submission to being destructive, please talk with someone you trust.)

Our response

- Ask God to expose what hinders our ability to trust Him. Listen to what He says.
- Pray a prayer of surrender, offering the outcomes in your life to God
- Confess where you have not lived with a submissive spirit, toward God, others, or your spouse
- Ask God to fill you with His Spirit, that you might have the courage and strength to live a surrendered life.