

# Unit 4



## Respect

*How Wives Fulfill Their Role in Marriage*

### TRUTH

#### by memory – Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)

*"However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."*

#### in Bible –

Last week you learned that husbands are to exercise their authority in marriage as servant-leaders who inspire their wives to follow without using force or intimidation. A husband's love for his wife must be an act of self-sacrifice motivated by a desire to sanctify her. Such Christ-like love is the essence of a man's husbandly duty: It is how he fulfills his role as head in marriage. This love is exemplified by a husband who honors his wife with sensitivity to her unique nature and needs.

This week you'll take a closer look at a wife's primary responsibility concerning her husband – respect. Respect is the key measure of a wife's submission to her husband's headship.

Do you remember the **PRAISE** model for personal worship and the **5 Targets of Prayer**? If not, refer back to Gospel Living unit 2. Try this approach as a guide for your personal worship this week.

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**Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18** – These passages should be pretty familiar by now. This time you'll focus on the verses that address a woman's responsibility to her husband.

Paul qualifies wives' submission to their husbands with these three phrases, "*...as to the Lord*", "*...in everything...*", and "*as is fitting in the Lord*". You might have trouble accepting this teaching from Paul, but for the moment, set aside your personal issues with Paul and describe what you think he is teaching about submission.

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Is Paul's teaching good for women in marriage, or bad? Explain your point of view.

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**1 Peter 3:1-6** – Notice that this passage addresses the concerns of Christian women who are married to unbelieving husbands.

What is Peter's counsel to these women? How can they most effectively make the gospel known to their husbands? Try to find at least 3 different instructions that Peter gives them.

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What emotional issue does Peter mention that would lead women to not submit to their husbands? How do you think a Christian wife could deal with this issue?

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## to summarize –

For the last few weeks you have been studying the Bible's teaching that God has defined specific roles for men and women in marriage. These roles are based on the creation order in which God created a man, gave him a task, and then created a woman who would correspond perfectly to him as his helper. God intended their relationship to display the harmony of corresponding equals, but sin corrupted their harmony and marriage relationships have been cursed by a lust for control ever since. However, in Christ it is possible again for husbands and wives to experience the harmony of the creation order when they embrace their God-given roles of headship and submission. It was admitted from the outset that this is an unpopular teaching in our society because it is assumed that submission implies inferiority. But the example of Christ's submission to the Father proves this to be false. And in addition, the Bible teaches that properly bearing these roles is an important part of husbands' and wives' spiritual life. Last week you learned that the spiritual quality of a man's headship in marriage is measured by how his headship reflects the unconditional, loving, servant-leadership of Christ for His church. So now, let's take a look at how a woman's submission in marriage reveals its spiritual quality.

First, let's begin by focusing on what the word *submission* means and strip away the negative emotional baggage many of us associate with this word. In the **in Bible** passages you studied, both Paul and Peter use the same Greek word translated "*submit*" or "*be subject*". Notice that the Apostles don't command husbands to subject their wives to their rule. Their teaching is not just a repackaging of the sinful pattern of male "*rule*" over females seen in Genesis 3:16. Rather, they speak to wives urging them to voluntarily adopt a yielding attitude toward their husbands. When used this way, the original Greek word carries the idea of willingly following another's direction, authority, advice or counsel. It shouldn't go unnoticed that submitting oneself to another is far different from being made to submit by another. One is about cooperation for the common good; the other is about domination for the good of the strong only, and this is not what the Apostles have in mind. So, Christian women should not fear that the biblical deck is stacked against them – that entering into Christian marriage as the submissive partner will necessarily expose them to exploitation.

Now, let's review Paul's teaching on wives' submission to their husbands. He writes,

*"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."*(Ephesians 5:22).

*"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."*  
(Ephesians 5:24).

*"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."*(Colossians 3:18).

As noted in the **in Bible** questions, each of these verses on submission is qualified with a reference to Christ, the Lord. What do you make of this? Does Paul really expect wives to submit to their husbands as the church must to Christ? In a word – yes. His instruction here is unmistakable: A Christian woman’s submission to her husband should reflect the church’s reverence for Christ. *Respect for her husband is the essence of her wifely duty: It is how she fulfills her God-given role of submission in marriage.* Paul concludes his discussion of marital roles with the instruction, “...the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33b). You may recall from last week that a Christian husband must love his wife unconditionally, even though she may be undeserving of that love. In the same way, a Christian wife must respect her husband unconditionally, even though he may be unworthy of such esteem. A Christian wife’s attitude toward, and treatment of, her husband should communicate that she has the highest regard for his role in their marriage. Her language and demeanor toward him must let him know, “I’m willing to trust you. I’m willing to follow you. Your plans will be my plans, and I’ll do my part to make them succeed.”

Now, how does this strike you? Can you embrace Paul’s teaching? You may find this difficult to accept because of the way you were raised or educated. Perhaps you are in a difficult marriage, and as much as you want to follow Christ in all things, you can’t help but think of several objections.

What if a husband isn’t worthy of respect? Perhaps he is lazy, self-centered or immature. How could such a man be respected? Peter dealt with a similar question when he counseled Christian wives of unbelievers, “...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.” (1 Peter 3:1-2). Notice that Peter focuses on these wives’ respectful *conduct* toward their unbelieving husbands. The lesson about respect is that it primarily has to do with the way you *treat* someone, not with the way you *feel* about them. An unbelieving husband can be treated with respect for his role even though his wife may not have personal feelings of admiration for him. This point also applies to husbands whose character flaws make it difficult for their wives to think highly of them. Though such a man’s character may not be worthy of respect, yet his wife’s conduct toward him should be respectful because of his role as head in the marriage. True, how much better it would be for that husband to earn the heartfelt admiration of his wife through wise, loving servant-leadership. But, as it was alluded to last week, conditional respect for one’s husband never created a better man. Instead, it only creates a man who lives in the frustration of the performance trap.

But again, your mind may be objecting to the seeming foolishness of this. Isn’t submitting to and respecting an unworthy man dangerously unwise? Isn’t it like following a person who is lost? Well, yes and no. Remember that a husband and wife are a team; they sink or swim together. So, it may be that respectfully submitting to a foolish husband will bring more problems than a woman has bargained for. Sometimes, the wife of an unworthy man may experience the difficulty of being in the

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will of God (by submitting to her God-given authority) but being outside the wisdom of God. In these cases, a wife must walk by faith, entrusting herself to the care of her merciful, heavenly Father. But, this is not the whole story. Respecting one's husband does not mean that a woman can't persuade him to see reason and wisdom. As Peter mentioned, she has an opportunity to influence him by her respectful conduct. Men usually have open ears for those whom they believe treat them respectfully. So although this disallows a wife from "putting her foot down", she can, as an equal partner in the marriage, help her husband by giving him another point of view to consider. In many situations, she may have the wisdom of God and perhaps her husband will have the sense to recognize it. But, her over-riding commitment must be to God's will that she respectfully submit to her husband.

And yet still, you may struggle with this teaching. Doesn't respectful submission to one's husband leave a woman in a vulnerable position? Wouldn't it be easy for a man to take advantage of his wife's submission? Actually, the sad truth is that an unspiritual husband will find ways to exploit his wife whether or not she has a submissive attitude toward him. But more importantly, you should remember that the Bible's teaching on marital roles is not an attempt to guarantee male dominance and oppression. God doesn't command wives to allow themselves to be victimized in the name of submission. Rather, He guards them by setting clear boundaries around a husband's behavior toward his wife, "...each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself..." (Ephesians 5:33a). And He provides the authority of the church which can and should intervene on her behalf if a husband becomes exploitive or abusive. So then, Christian women who enter into marriage may do so without fear, placing their hope in God as they embrace their God-given role. (See 1 Peter 3:5-6).

In conclusion, what practical counsel could be given to men and women?

First, to those who would like to be married: Place a high priority on finding a potential spouse who is committed to his or her God-given role. The long-term harmony and best interests of your marriage depends on both spouses' unswerving commitment to their roles and the responsibilities that go with them. To be blunt, you do not want to marry an unloving man or disrespectful woman. Remember that these qualities are measured by one's behavior, not the heightened emotions that one feels during courtship.

Secondly, for all: Keep in mind that husbands and wives are responsible before God to bear the responsibilities of their own role in marriage well; they *are not responsible to police their spouse's role*. Husbands are not to see to their wives' respect, any more than their wives are to see to their husbands' love. Each spouse must be committed to their own role and responsibility before God without the condition of their spouse doing the same.

Thirdly, don't fall into a tit-for-tat performance trap in your marriage: "I'll respect him, when he loves me." "I'll love her, when she respects me." This dishonors Christ and is a guaranteed marriage killer.

If your spouse isn't committed to his or her responsibility, pray for the grace to obey your Lord even when it hurts, trusting Him for the joy of obedience, and then follow your prayers with action. Do everything you can to ensure the stability of your marriage (yes, this is hard) even if you can't ensure your personal happiness in it. Of course, in cases of abuse, the stability of the marriage is no longer the prime issue; your personal safety should be your first concern.

Finally, a note to husbands: As you learned last week, you have a special responsibility to lead your wife with sacrificial love. She is not called to love you in the same way. Therefore, as leader it is your responsibility to set the tone in your marriage. This means you will take more of the blame and give more of the credit. It means being the first to humble yourself in order to bring reconciliation after an argument. You probably would choose to "forget about it" rather than talk it through. But your role dictates that you must take the lead in building the harmony in your marriage. Ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit to help you lovingly lead your wife through all the ups and downs you will encounter. It is up to you to win and keep her trust and respect. Don't live your life in such a way that you make it difficult for her to be submissive to you.

**online –**

Remember to visit [www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum](http://www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum) for this week's downloadable audio, video, or print resources.

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Husbands and wives: How has the truth shone a light on your marriage this week? Do you have any fears about the current state of your relationship with your spouse?

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Husbands and wives: How has the truth shone a light on your own heart this week? Are there any relational patterns of behavior you need to repent of?

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Wives: Rate your submission to your husband from 1 ("disrespectful") to 10 (respect "*as to the Lord*"). Describe how the truth this week will impact your conduct from this point on.

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## MISSION – STORY TELLING

*"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."*(Philemon 1:6, NIV)

By now you should have completed your 60-second Testimony. Continue preparing to share it from memory with your Journey Group. Also, continue praying for those on your prayer list, and specifically pray earnestly that God would give you an opportunity to share your testimony with them.

The second mission assignment is the same as last week, to have a spiritual conversation with your spouse or potential spouse. How much do you really know about your partner's spiritual life? Find out more this week! Look at this as an opportunity to prioritize the spiritual basis in your relationship by learning to become at ease discussing spiritual topics with your partner. If you need an idea for a simple conversation starter, try one of these:

- Share and discuss your testimony.
- Offer to pray with them about a current concern.
- Mention something you are learning in *The Journey*.
- Share a significant experience in your own spiritual journey.
- Ask about his/her own spiritual journey.

Use the space below to write something you learned about your partner's spiritual life that you may not have known before.

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When was the last time you connected with someone on your prayer list? Use the space below to describe your most recent interaction with someone on your prayer list.

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