

D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

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of discipleship.



Keeping it Real

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

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PROTECTING HUMAN AUTHORITY “EQUALITY AND LEADERSHIP IN MARRIAGE”

We will find that the Bible teaches two important principles that must be taught together: **the principle of equality in marriage** and **the principle of the husband’s leadership responsibility in marriage**.

Any discussion of manhood and womanhood in the Bible must start here. Every time we talk to another person, we should remember that that person is a creature of God who is more like God than anything else in the universe, and men and women share that status equally. Therefore, we should treat men and women with equal dignity and should think of both as having equal value. We both bear the image of God, and we have shared in that equality since the very first day that God created us.

HIERARCHY IN FAMILY

The subject of hierarchy in families is sure to raise eyebrows any time it is mentioned. One reason we are often touchy about this subject is our misunderstanding of how God views hierarchy. In the world’s view, family hierarchy is synonymous with **domination, control, and superiority**. But those things are contrary to God’s ideal for the family. The world’s system ranks people or groups according to importance and responds to them accordingly. In God’s system, to be the greatest means we must become the servant of all ([Mark 10:42–44](#)). There should be hierarchy in Christian families, but not in the way we might naturally enforce it.

When God created the family, He began with one man and one woman ([Genesis 1:27](#)). He then instructed them to “**be fruitful and multiply**” ([Genesis 1:28](#)). When Adam and Eve sinned, God punished each of them in different ways. Part of Eve’s punishment was that she would be driven by a desire to control her husband, but God would place the man over her in authority ([Genesis 3:16](#)). Although this was part of Eve’s curse, it was also God’s way of protecting women in the future. He had created Eve different from Adam, and, in order for them to work together in complementary ways, only one could be in charge. Without hierarchy, we have anarchy.

[Ephesians 5](#) picks up this theme and elaborates on the roles of husband and wife. Paul begins the section on family in verse 21 with “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” With that mindset in place, we are then prepared to accept the specifics of God’s hierarchy for the family. Without a willingness to live in mutual submission, we will easily distort and destroy the dynamic by which God designed families to thrive.

God gave the husband the role of servant-leader, as Jesus Christ was a servant-leader ([Mark 10:45](#)). The man’s responsibilities are to love his wife sacrificially ([Ephesians 5:25](#)), care for her as he would his own body ([Ephesians 5:28–29](#)), live with her in an understanding way ([1 Peter 3:7](#)), and bring up his children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). God placed the full responsibility for the family health on the shoulders of the husband. Husbands and fathers must give an account of their service to the Lord in the way they served, led, and loved their families.

To the wife, God gives the role of helper in the family hierarchy ([Genesis 2:18](#)). Rather than indicate subservience to the man, the word *helper* is also used of the Lord: “We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield” ([Psalm 33:20](#); cf. [Psalm 124:8](#)). Jesus used the term *Helper* to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives ([John 14:17](#), [26](#)). So, while God places the bulk of family responsibility upon the husband, He places a lighter burden upon the wife and instructs her to submit to her husband’s leadership, as the husband submits to Christ in all things ([Ephesians 5:22–24](#)). A wise husband seeks his wife’s input on family decisions, but a wise wife knows when to step back after expressing her opinion. Ideally, husband and wife are in agreement about family decisions. But on those occasions when they don’t agree, a wife is freed from the responsibility once she has expressed her views. She can then trust the Lord to work on her behalf through her husband’s decisions, right or wrong. The Lord has ways of protecting an obedient wife, despite whatever consequences He must levy against an erring husband.

After Christ, husband, and then wife, children are last in the family hierarchy. Children are never to rule the roost. Parents who allow their children to run wild, disobey, disrespect, and have their own way are demolishing God's hierarchy for the family. [Ephesians 6:1](#) says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." When parents require obedience from their children, they are training those children how to respond to God. God does not allow us to run wild, disobey, disrespect, and have our own way without severe consequences. Parents can model their parenting style after the heavenly Father and know they have the best possible example ([2 Corinthians 6:18](#)).

God instituted hierarchy in the family for our own good. Christ must always be first and foremost ([1 Corinthians 11:3](#)). His Word and His example are to be the standard in a Christian home. As husband and wife both seek the Lord together, they share the leadership role for the home and children. When each member of the family seeks to honor his or her role as a way of honoring God, the family flourishes and everyone's needs are met.

LEADERSHIP IN MARRIAGE

[Ephesians 5:23](#) makes it clear who should be the head of a household according to God's design for the family: "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." But we err when we disregard all the aspects of headship. A head cannot function on its own. It is as dependent on the rest of the body as the body is on the head. God is careful to define headship by comparing it to Christ and the church. That headship role is best fulfilled when the husband "loves his wife as Christ loves the church and gave himself for her" ([Ephesians 5:25-30](#)).

[Ephesians 5](#) assumes a married couple, with the [husband](#) as leader and the [wife](#) as supporter; however, many modern households do not fit that model. Some are headed by a single parent, others by a grandparent or an older sibling, and still others have some other construct. With that in mind, how do we define who should be at the head? Scripture is consistent in teaching the chain of command. The elder member of a household should be the head whenever possible. In Old Testament times, the eldest son received a double inheritance, called the birthright, upon his father's death. But he was also held responsible for the welfare of the entire household ([Genesis 27:19](#); [Deuteronomy 21:17](#)).

Children are commanded to [obey both parents](#), not just the head of the household ([Ephesians 6:1](#); [Colossians 3:20](#)). An undisciplined child brings shame and

disgrace to his *mother*, not just his father ([Proverbs 10:1](#); [29:15](#)). Wise parents agree on rules and discipline in front of the children. Any disagreements should be held behind closed doors so that parents can present a united front. As far as the children are concerned, a mother and father working together are the heads of the household.

Here are some principles relating to what it means to be the head of a household:

1. A head goes first. Godly leadership is [servant leadership](#) (see [Mark 10:44](#)). The head of a household is to be the role model for everyone else. If he/she wants the family to speak kindly and respectfully, he/she must model that type of speech. If a husband wants his wife to honor him, he must honor her. If a single mom wants her children to have a good work ethic, she must demonstrate what that looks like to them. Headship is not a dictatorship. The head of a household seeks wisdom, prays through issues, and then gently instructs the rest of the body in the direction it should go. If the senior member of a household is not functioning as a healthy head, the entire family suffers.

2. A head takes responsibility. When God handed out roles for the family, He placed the heaviest burden on the men. Headship may sound like superiority until we actually read God's expectations. The head of a household is responsible before God for the spiritual and emotional well-being of the family. God judged Eli for not restraining his wicked sons. Eli knew about their evil actions but did nothing about it, so God held Eli responsible as the head of the household ([1 Samuel 3:13](#)).

3. A head receives 51 percent of the vote. Two people will not agree on everything, no matter how closely aligned they are, and when there is a stand-off, who gets the deciding vote? God has decreed that it should be the head of the household, the husband if he is present. Of course, a wise head will consult his wife. Heads do not know everything, even though they carry the weight of responsibility for the decisions. So it is only smart to seek counsel and advice from the woman he pledged his life to. And, if she is a godly woman, she will share her studied opinion but then let her husband bear the weight of the decision on his own.

God designed the family, and He knows best how it functions. When we apply His standards of love, submission, responsibility, and servant leadership, the family thrives ([Ephesians 5:21–33](#); [Colossians 3:18–20](#); [1 Peter 3:1–7](#)). When a husband steps up and assumes the mantle of responsibility God has placed on him, the rest of the family finds it much easier to fulfill their own roles so that the family is a testament to God's design.

DOES A WIFE HAVE TO SUBMIT

Submission is an important issue in relation to marriage. Here is the plain biblical command: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” ([Ephesians 5:22–24](#)).

Even before sin entered the world, there was still the principle of the headship of the husband ([1 Timothy 2:13](#)). Adam was created first, and Eve was created to be a "helper" for Adam ([Genesis 2:18–20](#)). God has established several types of authority in the world: governments to enforce justice in society and provide protection; pastors to lead and feed the sheep of God; husbands to love and nurture their wives; and fathers to admonish their children. In each case, submission is required: citizen to government, flock to shepherd, wife to husband, child to father.

The Greek word translated “submit,” *hupotasso*, is the continuing form of the verb. This means that submitting to God, the government, a pastor, or a husband is not a one-time act. It is a continual attitude, which becomes a pattern of behavior.

First, of course, we are responsible to submit to God, which is the only way we can truly obey Him ([James 1:21](#); [4:7](#)). And each Christian should live in humble, ready submission to others ([Ephesians 5:21](#)). In regards to submission within the family unit, [1 Corinthians 11:2–3](#), says that the husband is to submit to Christ (as Christ did to God the Father) and the wife is to submit to her husband.

There is much misunderstanding in our world today about the roles of husband and wife within a marriage. Even when the biblical roles are properly understood, many choose to reject them in favor of a supposed “emancipation” of women, with the result that the family unit is torn apart. It’s no surprise that the world rejects God’s design, but God’s people should be joyfully celebrating that design.

Submit is not a bad word. Submission is not a reflection of inferiority or lesser worth. Christ constantly submitted Himself to the will of the Father ([Luke 22:42](#); [John 5:30](#)), without giving up an iota of His worth.

To counter the world’s misinformation concerning a wife’s submission to her husband, we should carefully note the following in Ephesians 5:22–24:1) A wife is to submit to one man (her husband), not to every man. The rule to submit

does *not* extend to a woman's place in society at large. 2) A wife is to willingly submit to her husband in personal obedience to the Lord Jesus. She submits to her husband because she loves Jesus. 3) The example of a wife's submission is that of the church to Christ. 4) There is nothing said of the wife's abilities, talents, or worth; the fact that she submits to her own husband does not imply that she is inferior or less worthy in any way. Also notice that there are no qualifiers to the command to submit, except "in everything." So, the husband does not have to pass an aptitude test or an intelligence test before his wife submits. It may be a fact that she is better qualified than he to lead in many ways, but she chooses to follow the Lord's instruction by submitting to her husband's leadership. In so doing, a godly wife can even win her unbelieving husband to the Lord "without words" simply by her holy behavior ([1 Peter 3:1](#)).

Submission should be a natural response to loving leadership. When a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church ([Ephesians 5:25—33](#)), then submission is a natural response from a wife to her husband. But, regardless of the husband's love or lack thereof, the wife is commanded to submit "as to the Lord" (verse 22). This means that her obedience to God—her acceptance of His plan—will result in her submission to her husband. The "as to the Lord" comparison also reminds the wife that there is a higher authority to whom she is responsible. Thus, she is under no obligation to disobey civil law or God's law in the name of "submission" to her husband. She submits in things that are right and lawful and God-honoring. Of course, she does not "submit" to abuse—that is not right or lawful or God-honoring. To try to use the principle of "submission" to justify abuse is to twist Scripture and promote evil.

The submission of the wife to the husband in [Ephesians 5](#) does not allow the husband to be selfish or domineering. His command is to love (verse 25), and he is responsible before God to fulfill that command. The husband must exercise his authority wisely, graciously, and in the fear of the God to whom he must give an account.

When a wife is loved by her husband as the church is loved by Christ, submission is not difficult. [Ephesians 5:24](#) says, "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." In a marriage, submission is a position of giving honor and respect to the husband (see [Ephesians 5:33](#)) and [completing](#) what he is lacking in. It is God's wise plan for how the family should function.

Commentator [Matthew Henry](#) wrote, "The woman was made out of Adam's side. She was not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be

trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.” The immediate context of the commands to the husband and wife in [Ephesians 5:19–33](#) involves the filling of the Spirit. Spirit-filled believers are to be worshipful (5:19), thankful (5:20), and submissive (5:21). Paul then follows this line of thought on Spirit-filled living and applies it to wives in verses 22–24. A wife should submit to her husband, not because women are inferior (the Bible never teaches that), but because that is how God designed the marital relationship to function.