

# Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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## I. Introduction

As a husband, God tells you that you have to submit to your wife; you have to love her the way Jesus loved His wife and died for her. But what if your wife refuses to submit to you, do you still have to put her interests above your own? If you do, how do you actually do that, how will that work? Because won't she take it as a sign of weakness and walk all over you?

## II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

### Chapter 5

God commands husbands to submit to their wives the way Christ did—He put her interests above His own and died for her, Ephesians 5:21, 25-32. But what if your wife refuses to submit to you; do you still have to submit to her? If you do, how do you die for a rebellious wife? And what's with all this talk of authority; I thought husbands were supposed to love their wives not rule over them? How can love and authority go together; they seem antithetical?

**How do you die for/submit to a rebellious wife?** You have to ask yourself who is the problem. Is it your failure or hers, is she in sin, or are you? If your wife doesn't respect you, you need to find out why. Are you loving her as Christ did the Church? Does she not trust you? If not, why not? Whatever the issue, you need to know who's actually rebelling against God, you or her? And once you know the answer, then you can correct the problem through *your sacrifice*.

1. *Your command to die doesn't come with a condition.* God didn't say, "Submit to your wife unless she refuses to submit to you." As with His command to the wives, His command to husbands to die for their wives comes with no conditions. You must do it regardless of your wife's behavior.
2. *You're supposed to ~~force~~ love her into submission.* If your wife refuses to submit to you because you're a tyrant or demanding respect from her, you're failing in your command. You're supposed to love her into submission. Remember, her command is in the passive, i.e., her submission to you must come from her not be forced by you, Ephesians 5:22, 24. She must want to submit to you, which begs a question in your direction, "What do you need to do to make her **want to** submit to you? What kind of man do you need to be that will cause her to submit to you on her own?" Are you giving your life for your wife? Are you serving her and ministering to her needs the way Christ did for us?
3. *A wife will follow a Christ-like husband.* It never fails. Every time I ask a potential wife or a wife who has a marriage that's in deep trouble, "Would you be willing to submit to a husband who put you first always?" The answer is always "Yes," even from the most ardent wife who disagrees with the command to submit. Once they realize that God is not a male chauvinist nor advocating for male chauvinism, but instead is calling for the opposite, for husbands to sacrifice for their wives, to put her interests before his own, then

they understand and are willing to follow their husband's lead. The question to wives could be put another way, "Would you be willing to submit to Christ if He were your husband?" I imagine their answer would be an unequivocal "Yes." Why? Because Jesus is the kind of husband who cares about you, who wouldn't rule over you but lovingly lead you, who wouldn't ignore your concerns or input, who would always seek your best even if it meant having a difficult conversation with you, who would sacrifice for you even if he was tired, even if he had a bad day, and would do it without you asking. If you behave like this, if your treatment of your wife is Christ-like—which is exactly what God is calling you to do, Ephesians 5:25-32, then your wife would be more than willing to submit to you, to respect you, to follow your lead as the head of the family. How you lead is what makes a wife want to follow.

4. Godly submission begets godly submission. God designed humanity in a very interesting way: when someone is nice to you, it makes you want to be nice to them. There's something visceral inside you that automatically reacts to their niceness; you want to be nice back. That is why when a husband dies for his wife (and vice versa), it makes the wife want to die for her husband. I've seen this principle over and over in marriages that were so broken, so doomed to divorce. When one spouse began dying for the other, there was a snowball effect. Their spouse wanted to die for them in return and their tendency to keep score disappeared. Instead, you had two individuals who were looking out for the other person and the more their spouse died for them, the more they wanted to love and respect them. So if your wife refuses to submit to you, are you exhibiting godly submission towards her?
5. What if my wife holds past mistakes against me and thus refuses to submit? **First**, are you still making those mistakes? Are you a competent leader now or do you still not know how to lead the family? If you're still making those mistakes and have no clue how to actually be the leader of your family, then you need to address your mistakes and have a mature, godly man mentor you in how to be the leader of your family. **Second**, has there been actual forgiveness for those past mistakes or did you and your wife just put a band aid on it? If actual forgiveness hasn't occurred, then the wound is still there. You need to go through the steps of forgiveness: repentance, confession, asking for forgiveness, forgiveness is given and received, and restitution is made, i.e., whatever was damaged is repaired, e.g., trust (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9). **Third**, if you're no longer making those mistakes and are a competent leader, then the problem is with your wife and you have to help her see her error. How you do it though is crucial; she must know that you have her best interest in mind, that you're not trying to dominate her, that you love her and your marriage, which is why you're helping her fix something that is damaging to her, you, your marriage, and your family.
6. What if my wife is a strong woman with her own ideas and refuses to submit? **First**, even if the issue is with your wife, you must ensure that you're not part of the problem. That is, you must not be a domineering husband but a loving, godly leader who engenders willing submission from his wife. **Second**, if she's never been taught how to be a strong woman, then it's your duty as leader and protector to look out for your wife's best interest Ephesians 5:26-27, and show her how to be a wise, strong, and independent godly woman, like the Proverbs 31 wife. If she won't take this godly advice from you, then you look for a mature, godly woman or man who can show her how. Again, how you do this is key; she must know that you have her best interest in mind, that you're not looking to subjugate her but free her from Satan's idea of a strong woman. You want her to see that God wants wise, strong, and independent godly women and what that looks like.

7. *I'm afraid to lead my wife for fear of rejection, criticism, or disagreement.* **First**, anytime you begin a sentence with, "I'm afraid to...for fear of..." you have a giant problem. You're the husband; it's your job not to be afraid and if you are, you're supposed to know where to turn for courage and wisdom: the Lord (Psalm 56:11; Proverbs 3:5-6). **Second**, if you're a bad leader, rejection, criticism, and disagreement are no surprise. So learn how to be a good leader. **Third**, you need to learn how to deal with rejection: is the reason for their rejection true or false? That is, is the rejection due to your failure or hers? If it's a failure in you, then fix it. If it's a failure in her, help her overcome her error. **Fourth**, you need to realize that not all criticism and disagreement is bad. When the criticism or disagreement is correct, then it's there for your benefit, it's there to help you, especially if it's from your wife, the one God sent to help you (Genesis 2:18). **Fifth**, if you've always struggled with rejection and/or criticism, then you have a deeper problem and you need to fix it. Find a mature, godly man or woman who can help you hear the Lord's voice concerning this issue. Through this mentorship, the Lord will free you from the stranglehold that Satan has on your manhood; He will show you the real reason underneath your fears of rejection and criticism.
8. *Do I still have to die for her, if she refuses to submit to me?* Yes, recall that there are NO conditions on God's command to die for your wife. But you must be wise about your dying. That is, if your wife refuses to submit even though you keep dying for her and all this does is embolden her to rebel against you even more because she sees you as weak, then your dying is feeding bad behavior. Your dying in this instance is not good for her, you, your marriage, or your family. There is a place for husbands to keep dying for rebellious wives as there is a place for wives to keep submitting to rebellious husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2) in hopes that the Lord will turn them around. The Lord did the same for us, i.e., when He died for us, we were not submitting to His authority; we were utterly rebellious (Mark 15:12-15; Romans 5:8, 10). Yet He kept dying for us and He keeps dying for us today even though we are still rebellious towards His authority as individuals and as a Church. However, the Lord also holds us accountable for our rebellious sins (Romans 1:18; Hebrews 12:5-11). So, if your wife is not responding to your loving, godly dying, then it's time to do something about it. Again, it matters how you do it. She must know that you love her and have her best interest in mind, that you're doing this because of the damage it's causing her, you, and your family. And if she will not hear it from you, then you inform her that you will be reaching out to the family of God for a godly, mature woman to help her overcome her rebellious nature (1 Corinthians 12:26). In the meantime, you keep dying but you make sure that you do it in a way that doesn't feed bad behavior, as you keep reaching out to God's family and you keep praying and asking God for His conviction and intervention.

**How can love and authority go hand in hand?** If God tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, how can this coexist with the idea that the husband has authority over the wife? To say that the husband is the "authority" in the marriage seems archaic, it seems chauvinistic, it seems like it's from a time when women didn't have any rights at all and men held all the power. And the idea that the husband has final authority in everything is very difficult for many women to accept. However, the question is this, "Why is it so hard for *any* woman to accept this?" It all hinges on the word "authority" and what we mean by it vs. what God means by it. That is, what exactly do women who object to this believe God is saying? And is He in fact saying that? Have they understood what God means or are they working with a definition of authority that they got from someone/somewhere else?

What does God mean by authority? **First**, it is true that the word “authority” doesn’t appear in Ephesians 5:22-24. However, the concept, idea, and very definition of authority is present in every verse: in 5:22, wives are called to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord,” which means as they would submit to the Lord’s authority, they’re to submit to their own husband’s. In 5:23, “the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church,” which again explicitly implies authority, i.e., whoever is the head has authority over anyone under them. In 5:24, “as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything,” i.e., “in everything” makes it crystal clear that there’s nothing outside a husband’s authority concerning his wife. Finally, the original Greek word for “submit” in 5:22 means to bring someone under the firm control of someone else but it’s stated as a passive, which means that the wife is to willingly place herself under this authority. **Second**, who’s definition are we working with, God’s or ours? That is, if sinful man says that the husband has final authority in everything, it would mean that he’s got carte blanche over his wife, no if’s, and’s, or but’s. But when God says it, we’re dealing with a being who is all-powerful, yet, decided to die for us even though we were mercilessly accusing Him, abusing Him, rejecting Him, denying Him, and crucifying Him. When He says that the husband has final authority in everything and then tells him that he better exercise it the way He exercised power and authority over us, then we’re dealing with authority that is loving and sacrificial (Matthew 20:25-28). So who’s definition are we working with, His or ours?

Having authority over your wife and kids doesn’t mean tyrannical rule. If we think God is saying, “The man has all the power and the woman has to shut up and do whatever he says,” we’re gravely mistaken. This is not what God means at all. If this is what you think God means, you didn’t get it from Him. So what does God mean by “authority” in marriage; what is His definition of authority when it comes to the husband? And what does it look like in action? The world’s definition at its worst is absolute power; he says what goes and she has to go along with it. At its best, it’s 50/50, i.e., the husband and wife have equal power. God’s definition is this: he has final authority in everything but he’s never to exercise it without considering her interest, input or concern. What does it look like when godly authority is exercised properly? There is care, concern, love, and sacrifice. The husband will look like Jesus, who sacrificially and lovingly put our interests above His own and died in order to rescue us, make us better, and give us an awesome life, Ephesians 5:25-29 (Matthew 20:25-28; John 10:10). If you clearly understand what God is saying, that He’s not giving your husband tyrannical authority over you or the family, but you still have a problem with willingly placing yourself under your husband’s headship, then you need to ask God to reveal to you what lie Satan told you about godly authority so that He can free you from it.

In God, authority and love are never divorced from each other, God is many “omni” words, i.e., He’s omniscient, omnipresent, etc. But He’s all these things at once. So, although He’s omnipotent, He’s also omni-loving, both at the same time. His authority over us is never divorced from His love for us. When He exercises authority over us it’s because of His love. This is why His authority over us is never abusive, tyrannical, demeaning, or any such thing. If you want to see what God means by authority, just look at Christ; after all, He’s the one God commands husbands to be like. Jesus is walking power and love all at the same time (John 8:1-11). Love and authority can coexist in husbands when they submit to Jesus, Ephesians 5:18. When husbands do power and love the way Jesus did, they won’t be tyrannical.

### III. Conclusion

*...submitting to one another in the fear of God.*