

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

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## I. Introduction

Currently the success rate of all marriages is about 50%, including Christian marriages. About half of all marriages end in divorce or separation. Of those that stay married, many are miserable; they're married but deep down they wish they weren't. How do we avoid being another bad statistic? How can we create a marriage that we actually want to be in? How can we stay married and be happy at the same time? Is it even possible? God says, "**Absolutely!**"

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

### Chapter 5:18, 21-33

#### SUMMARY OF GOD'S WISDOM ON MARRIAGE: WIVES

**FIRST**, if you want your marriage to succeed, you have to listen to God. There are thousands of articles, books, and gurus on marriage and yet we still have a 50% divorce rate. If you want to know how to operate something, ask the manufacturer. If you want to know how marriage works, ask the Inventor, God (Genesis 2:18-24). The first thing God tells us about marriage is that we have to listen to Him; He's the only one who knows how the hardware and software work because He invented both. God tells us that marriage is about submission; the wife must submit to the husband and the husband to the wife. But this is the second step; the first step is submitting to God, i.e., if we want a happy marriage, we first have to submit to God, 5:18. We must let His Spirit control how we talk to our spouse, react to our spouse, love our spouse, respect our spouse, how we treat our spouse in every situation. If we first submit to God's Spirit, then even when we get it wrong, His Spirit will enable us to fix it and bless us with a happy marriage.

#### What God Says to Wives:

God tells wives to submit to their husbands in everything as they would to Him. What's the wife's role? God clearly spells out what her role is. As Christ is head of the church, God has determined that the husband is to be the head of the home. In light of this, the wife is to willingly submit to her husband in everything, 5:22-24.

***But doesn't this open the wife up to abuse?*** Not at all: marriage is God's institution; He makes the rules not the husband. It's not just the wife who must submit; the husband must also. The husband cannot force his wife to submit; it must willingly come from her. In marriage, the wife's submission concerns one man: her husband, not all men. Thus, her submission is not a statement of her inferiority; in fact, submission brings her equality that protects her because he must submit to her too. As Christ, the husband is to be a savior not a dictator. If the husband abuses her, he'll have to answer to Christ via the Church, 5:23-24 (Matthew 18:15-17).

**Marriage is a team sport.** Marriage is oneness in every sense of the word: physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Genesis 2:24). This means that the husband and wife are a unified team; what he does affects her and what she does affects him. Yes, there's a leader, the husband, but the wife is not a lesser player. She's a key half of this whole; she has what he's missing (Genesis 2:18). Thus, she will have valuable wisdom and advice about everything in the marriage.

**Why do I have to submit to my husband?** Because God said so. This is not being flippant. We don't get to participate in endeavors which require training and following specific rules unless we get that training and follow those rules. Marriage is such an endeavor. It was created by God, not man, and it works according to *His* rules. If you don't follow His rules, you will run into serious problems. To refuse to submit to your husband is to refuse God, not your husband. The authority and leadership he has doesn't come from him; it comes from God.

**What does it mean to "submit in everything"?** Just what it says, "in everything." This means that your husband has the final say in every decision. But he's to lead with love, not tyranny, which means he must take the needs of his wife and family into consideration.

**Is submitting not having an opinion?** NO! The fact that you have something your husband needs (Genesis 2:18), requires you to have an opinion about everything in the home. You're there to provide missing wisdom, which will help him avoid sin or foolish decisions. Sometimes you will be silent as you wait on the Lord for the words or for Him to correct your rebellious husband (1 Peter 3:1-2). Other times, you must speak in order to protect your husband and family (1 Samuel 25).

**What if my husband's decisions are foolish/dangerous and will likely hurt the family?** If it's sinful, illegal, or dangerous, then you don't submit; instead, you submit to God rather than to your husband (Acts 5:27-29). If it's foolish but not sinful, illegal or dangerous, then you submit to his decision. But ask the Lord for wisdom to voice your concern and once you do, wait on the Lord to correct his folly. If his foolishness persists, let your husband know that you're going to ask your church family for help (1 Corinthians 12:26). God never wants wives to just sit there and take abuse or mistreatment from their husbands. They have recourse.

**But isn't submission unfair; aren't we equals before God?** As individuals before God, yes, the man and woman are absolutely equal before God (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7). But in marriage, they are not; they have different roles. God clearly placed the husband as head of the wife, 5:22-24. And if we say that a wife's submission in marriage is unfair, we're saying God is unfair, which He's not (Ezekiel 18:25). Additionally, contrary to popular opinion, submission is a blessing not a curse. Even God has to submit (1 Corinthians 11:3), but it doesn't demean or rob Him; as with us, it glorifies Him (Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:12).

**How do I submit to my husband?** First, you have to realize that the command to submit comes from God not your husband. But even God is not going to force you. Instead, He wants you to willingly submit because you trust Him to bless you and protect you through your submission. Second, God gave you the gift of wife and submission to accomplish great things in your husband and family; you're a godly instrument in His hands. Third, to submit simply means to respect your husband, 5:33, even when he's failing you as a husband (1 Peter 3:1). If you're willing to sacrifice for your husband this way, God will bless you and him.

***How can the wife's role of helpmate and submission coexist?*** The fact that the husband is the head of the wife doesn't mean that she's a silent partner. The husband and wife are two halves of a whole that are meant to work together, 5:28-31, in order to accomplish what God laid before them collectively and individually (Genesis 1:28). In order to do this, the wife must be a vocal partner; her help—her input, advice, and wisdom—is crucial.

***What if my husband never asks for my help or input?*** Your role as helpmate includes helping him see his ungodly behavior. And if he never seeks your input, this is ungodly; he's violating God's command of oneness which includes working together (Genesis 1:28; 2:24 cf. Ephesians 5:28-31). In this case, helper means pointing out his error. How you do it is key. Never command your husband, always ask or suggest. Word it in a way that points out the error and makes him think. If you don't know how to say it, ask the Lord for wisdom. If he refuses to accept your help, inform him that you'll be asking a trusted church member for help (1 Corinthians 12:26) because of the damage it's causing you, him, and your marriage.

***But won't submitting leave me vulnerable to abuse?*** The commands God gave us were not designed for others to abuse us. If God tells us to do something and we're abused in the process, then we have to trust in His protection. If your husband abuses you, he will have to answer to the Lord: you can call the local authorities (Romans 13:4) or the authorities of the church (Matthew 18:15-17). Like Jesus, you have to let the Lord avenge you (1 Peter 2:21-23).

***Why is it so hard to submit to my husband?*** First, rebellion against authority is in our blood. Satan was the first to rebel against authority (Isaiah 14:13-14 cf. Ezekiel 28:11-19) and he taught it to us (Genesis 3:5-6). Thus, Adam's sinful nature is in us and it hates God's authority (Romans 5:12-14, 19; 8:7). Second, part of God's discipline for rebelling against Him is that He made submission to each other much more difficult. Now, the wife will want to dominate the husband and the husband the wife (Genesis 3:16). Third, having a weak husband makes it very difficult to submit. This forces you to take the authority in the marriage. But you must step back and force him to take his God-given responsibility. If he refuses, get help from a trusted church member because his sin against God, you, and your children is subject to Christ, 5:24. If you keep taking up his slack, then he'll keep behaving like your son instead of your husband. Fourth, a tyrannical husband who thinks he can say or do whatever he wants regardless of his wife and kids also makes it difficult to submit. In this case, keep respecting him (1 Peter 3:1) unless it's sin, illegal, abusive or dangerous. If he won't repent, then call on the church family for help.

***What happens when the woman leads and the man follows?*** First, the reason why God (not your husband) placed your husband as the authority in the home has nothing to do with intelligence or capability; some wives are more intelligent and capable than their husbands. It has to do with the two roles in marriage and who plays them: there's a male and a female and one of them is the leader, the authority, and the other is in submission to that authority. These roles are defined by God's marriage: in His marriage, He, the male, is the husband; the Church, the female, is the wife, 5:22-32. This is why the husband is to be the leader because his role reflects God's role. Second, when the roles are reversed, there are devastating consequences (Genesis 3:1-7, 17; 16:1-12). When the wife leads, the husband may shutdown and live in silent anger, or be vocal about his resentment and anger, or retreat into weakness and react like a son rather than a husband, all of which leave him emasculated and her frustrated.

***What submission looks like.*** Yes, the wife is to submit to her husband, but she has a voice and a vote. She's a key partner who will give her husband input, advice, and wisdom regarding him and the family. At times she will do this without a word as Sarah did with Abraham (1 Peter 3:1-6). Other times she must speak to prevent disaster but always with respect knowing that her husband has the final decision (Genesis 16:4-6; 21:8-13). When God describes the ideal wife in Proverbs 31, she's strong and independent, yet submissive (31:11-12, 16, 22, 23, 31). She submits to God first (31:30) which enables her to submit to her husband (31:11-12), family (31:15, 21, 27), her servants (31:15), and her community (31:20). Because of her submission, God glorifies her through her husband (31:11, 28-29) and family (31:28), all of which leaves her without anxiety and looking to the future with joy (31:21, 25).

### III. Conclusion

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