

The Most Misunderstood Verse in the Bible

If you had to choose one verse to call the most misunderstood verse in the Bible, I believe a strong case could be made that Ephesians 5:22 is that verse. Speaking of submission, it says, “wives to your own husbands as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22, TLV).

If you don’t believe me, just do a Google search, and you will find a plethora of Bible teachers using this verse as a baton to beat down women who refuse to become servants and slaves to domineering husbands who use it to justify their roles as domestic abusers. Forget the fact that just one verse before this verse we read: “Also submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Messiah” (Eph. 5:21).

This section of Scripture actually begins with the instruction for husbands and wives to submit to each other. It goes on to instruct wives to submit to their own husbands, as opposed to submitting to all men. Unfortunately, for those who want to use this verse to force women to obey and subjugate themselves to their husband’s complete rule and reign, the text doesn’t stop there. It continues with a qualifier for this submission:

“For the husband is head of the wife, as Messiah also is head of His community. Himself the Savior of the body. But as Messiah’s community is submitted to Messiah, so also the wives to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Messiah also loved His community and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, having cleansed her by immersion in the word” (Eph. 5:23-26).

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Notice that verses 23 and 24 provide the reader with qualifying statements, which could also be translated

“because”: “Because the husband is the head of the wife as Messiah also is head of His community—Himself the Savior of the body” and “Husbands, love your wives just as Messiah also loved His community and gave Himself up for her.”

While largely overlooked by those who teach blind subjugation, rather than submission, these verses provide an important qualification for submission.

For clarity, just look at Romans 13:1: “Let every person submit himself to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are put in place by God” (Rom. 13:1).

This verse uses the same word for “submit” that is used in Ephesians 5, but we all would, or at least *should*, agree that this verse is not telling us that if our government, or even religious leaders, command us to commit a criminal act that we should submit to that authority because Romans 13:1 tells us to. Not at all! Because we understand that the authority that comes from G-D wouldn’t command us to sin. So, if the government or religious authorities command us to do something contrary to G-D’s Word, we as believers must refuse to submit to their authority.

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Likewise, if a husband tells a wife to do something contrary to G-D’s Word, she has the full and biblically correct right to choose not to submit. However, Ephesians 5 goes even further than just speaking about submitting to a husband when he asks his wife to do something unrighteous. It includes asking his wife to do something unrighteously. In other words, the reason and motivation for the husband asking the wife to submit is also to be taken into account.

If a husband wants to have a biblically submissive wife, then

all that he asks of her should be asked not out of selfishness or a desire to have a servant-spouse, but rather because he wants her to be blessed. His desires of her should be for her, not only for him.

The wife should submit to her husband because her husband has fully submitted to Yeshua (Jesus). The wife should submit to her husband because she knows that he has given himself for her and because he loves her. True submission requires complete trust that the one being submitted to is not acting out of selfish authority, but rather acting out of servanthood and submission to their authority.

So, bottom line: A wife is responsible to submit to her husband if her husband is submitted to G-D, and by being submitted to G-D, her husband also submits to his wife.

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