

It is wise and God-honoring to submit to the God-given roles in marriage. There are foundational principles for all relationships. They have specific application in marriage.

I. *Foundation principles for following the God-given roles in marriage*

1. *Your “times” (current culture) makes it important to follow God’s commands in marriage.*

This age in which we live is evil (5:16). We need the Bible to help us discern what is right and wrong among the culturally “normal” things. Be wise and not foolish, live in awe of God (cf. Proverbs 9:10). Be on guard against the evil. Learn and follow what God has said in the Bible about marriage.

2. *You need the Holy Spirit to live victoriously in marriage.*

Instead of being under the control of alcohol, a believer should submit to the Spirit and be under His control. You submit to the Spirit when you choose to obey God’s commands. The Spirit then strengthens you to obey.

Verse 19 has the primary command, “be filled with the Spirit.” The next three verses all depend upon that command including submitting to one another. Paul gives three specific relationships where submitting to one another has special application: marriage (5:22–33), parents and children (6:1–4), and slaves and masters (6:5–9).

3. *There is a sense in which all believers are to submit to one another.*

In all those relationships believers submit to one another, though in a different fashion. Wives submit functionally to their husbands. A husband submits his desires and needs in order to love his wife, that is, to do what is best for her.

II. *The basic roles of husbands and wives in marriage*

1. *Wives are to submit to their husbands by accepting and respecting his leadership.*

- a. Submission and respect are the two responsibilities which Paul requires of wives (5:22, 33). Submission yields leadership to the husband. “Respect” addresses more the attitude in which one submits.
- b. In this passage Paul states two reasons for these responsibilities: (1) When God established marriage, He made Adam to be head. Hence, a wife should submit to what God intended in marriage. (2) When God established marriage, He intended marriage to picture the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church (5:31–32). A wife should submit because it displays the relationship of the church to Jesus Christ.

2. *Husbands should sacrificially love their wives.*

Paul explains not only the role of the husband, but also teaches about Jesus and the church. Both the creation of man and woman as well as the analogy to Christ and the Church explain the sacrificial love which a husband should have for his wife.

- a. When God established marriage at creation, he created man and woman to be united, that is, to become one flesh. Even though exactly what happens remains a mystery, the consequence is clear: a man should treat his wife as his own body. Just as he cares for himself, a man should care for his wife. This is not “normal” in most cultures today. But it is the standard which God sets for husbands.
- b. Since marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church, the relationship between Christ and the Church also provides instruction on how the husband should relate to his wife.
 - 1) The husband should love his wife as Christ loved the church. Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church (5:25). He willingly accepted crucifixion so that we might die to sin (1 Peter 2:24).

This is the standard of love which Jesus has set, putting self in second place. A husband cannot excuse himself from loving just because his wife may not submit or be sinful in her responses. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).
 - 2) Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her for the sake of her moral purity. Christ did what we needed, not what we wanted when we were sinners. A husband loves his wife by doing what she needs. That may be different than doing whatever she wants.

The pattern of Jesus also suggests that a husband should also be concerned about the spiritual welfare of his wife. Being head of the family is not just getting to make decisions. It includes providing materially, emotionally and spiritually.

The command for a husband to love his wife as he loves himself and for a wife to respect her husband (5:33) is no more or less possible than all of God’s commands. We fail miserably at the two greatest commandments, to love God completely and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–39).

In Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for our failure. God makes the believer a new creation. You, as a believer, will want to love and respect as you should. You will try. But you will continue to need God’s grace, both for forgiveness and for the strength to obey. Living together as husband and wife as God desires is a spiritual challenge. But God is faithful. His grace is abundant. He strengthens and He forgives.