

# **The Biblical View of Headship - Part 3b - Headship in Marriage: Wives submitting to their husbands (continued) and their role in the family**

## **Memory verse:**

*1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV*

*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

“Head” in this context, means; the leader, the chief, the one in charge, or the top person. Headship has everything to do with authority or rank and its corresponding role. It doesn’t have anything to do with value or worth or essence or being. It’s like the different ranks in the army—the person with the lower rank takes orders from the person with the higher rank, however they all work together towards the same goal or purpose.

Why is headship important?

*Where there is recognition of, and submission to, these roles, there is order, community, love, relationship, and harmony. We see this in the way Jesus related to the Father.*

## **Revision**—Last time we learned about:

The first marriage, Adam and Eve, and saw that Eve was created to be a helper comparable to Adam. The order of creation (Adam first) is the basis or foundation for the different roles of men and women in marriage and in the church.

It’s not good for man to be alone: God made mankind in His own image, meaning that we are only content and satisfied if we have loving relationships with other people.

We also considered some important principles about submission:

- Submission is a part of everyday life
- We ought to obey God rather than men: moral limits of our submission to others
- Submission glorifies God
- Walking in the light means living a life of submission
- The wife’s submission to her husband is “as to the Lord”, meaning to be motivated by a desire to please and obey God’s command for her to submit to her husband.

## ***A practical definition of submission***

To submit means that:

- You recognise someone has legitimate authority over you.
- You recognise that there is an order of authority, and that you are part of a unit, a team.
- You as an individual are not more important than the working of the unit or the team—always *sub* to the *mission* (This applies to both the husband and wife, who should both be working, according to their respective roles, to glorify God through their marriage).

## Outline

Today we continue learning about the wife submitting to her husband “as unto the Lord” before moving onto her role in the marriage relationship and the attributes of a godly wife.

1. The wife’s submission is “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22)
2. Overcoming the old nature by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:8-10, 18-21)
3. The role of a godly wife
4. The attributes of a godly wife

### **1. The wife’s submission is “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22)**

This means that her motivation for submitting to and obeying her husband is because she desires to please, honour, and obey God out of her love and gratitude towards God—this is the only way the wife can willingly submit to her husband. How does a wife come to this place of willing submission? It’s as easy as one two three: the wife must understand and trust three things concerning God, His character, and His promises. Consider the following logic statement:

1. **God loves us**—John 3:16, Romans 5:8
2. **God is sovereign and is therefore in total control of everything**
3. **Therefore, God only does or allows what is best for us**—every circumstance, good or bad (except the pain we inflict upon ourselves as a result of our own sinful choices), is His loving perfect best for us, being a part of His eternal plan to transform us into the image of His Son (see Romans 8:28-39)

The wife who embraces these truths does not chafe under or resist her husband’s authority, but rather sees her submission to her husband as an opportunity to demonstrate her love, loyalty, trust in, and obedience to God. The wife submitted to God understands and puts her faith in the three promises above and applies them to her own circumstances. She believes:

1. **God loves me**
2. **God is in control and has a plan for my life**—His perfect will and plan for me is that I be a helper for, and co-worker with, my husband (see the previous study)
3. **Therefore, the husband I am married to is God’s best for me**—God will use this marriage, difficult or otherwise, to cause me to grow into the image of Christ, which will not only result in me learning to love and trust Christ more in the here and now, but will also result in an exceeding weight of glory for me to enjoy forever in the presence of God—if I choose to trust God and submit to His will or plan for my life.

Many women have testified at the end of their lives, after enduring a very difficult marriage (usually to an unbelieving husband), that they wouldn’t have had it any other way—they recognise that their faith and character would not have grown as much, and their relationship with God would never have been so deep, rich, and rewarding—their trials produced an intimacy with God that they will not exchange for any temporary happiness that this world can offer—including a happy family.

### ***The example of Daniel submitting “as unto the Lord”***

We can use of Daniel as a perfect example of what it means to submit to someone who has authority over him “*as unto the Lord*” (like the godly wife submits to her husband “*as unto the Lord*”— see Ephesians 5:22-24). Daniel submitted to the king of Persia “*as unto the Lord*”, meaning that he first submitted himself to God, obeying God first no matter what the cost, willingly enduring the negative consequences that resulted from the foolish decisions made by the king whom God had placed in authority over him. We will see that this king actually liked Daniel, but he was selfish and proud, and therefore he made selfish and prideful decisions which caused great suffering and hardship for Daniel; just like a husband who loves and is committed to his wife will still at times make selfish and prideful decisions that will negatively impact his wife.

Daniel 6:10-23 NKJV (selected verses)

**Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed [the law banning prayer to anyone but the king], he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days [demonstrating total submission to God based on love for God, and dependance on God].**

<sup>11</sup> Then [the other officials who were jealous of Daniel] assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. <sup>12</sup> And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king’s decree: “Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?”

The king answered and said, “The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.”

<sup>13</sup> So they answered and said before the king, “That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” [*we ought to obey God rather than man—see Acts 5:29*]

<sup>14</sup> **And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself (he had made a foolish, selfish, prideful decision), ...**

<sup>16</sup> **So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.”** <sup>17</sup> Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed. ...

<sup>20</sup> And when he came to the den [*the next morning*], he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

<sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> **My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him [Daniel understood the three promises above—it would all work out for his good]; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you [he had always willingly submitted to the kings commands when they didn’t violate God’s commands].”**

<sup>23</sup> Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. **So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God [that these circumstances were God’s perfect will for him and would ultimately benefit him, which they did].**

Notice that because Daniel trusted God implicitly (without qualification), he had no fear of how the king's prideful and foolish decisions would affect him. Yes, it was a scary trial—no-one in their right mind would want to be thrown into a lions den—but God was with Daniel through the trial, and Daniel experienced the power of God like he never had before.

Notice also in verse 23 that Daniel was examined after his trial and "no injury whatever was found on him". Like the godly women I mentioned before who would not change anything, Daniel also had no regrets—in the end, the difficult experience didn't leave him traumatised, but rather revitalised—you can hear the joy in his heart! The difference between the two is simple faith in God.

### ***The bad example of Abraham as a husband***

Another enlightening example is when Abraham lied about Sarah, saying that she was his sister, and she was taken into the king's harem. *This actually happened twice* (see Genesis 12:10-20, and 20:1-17)! However, both times God protected Sarah from what could be labelled the most obvious, premeditated, and completely selfish act of cowardice on the part of a husband in the Scriptures. In the second instance, God warned the king that Sarah was the wife of Abraham, and that if he did not return her to Abraham her husband, then God would kill him (the king)—this shows that God is more than able to protect wives from the effects of their husband's pride and foolishness. Wives, even if your husband throws you under the bus, repeatedly, like Abraham did to Sarah, God has your back. Trust God. Depend on God. Love God. Submit to God.

### ***The good example of Sarah despite Abraham's failure as a husband***

An interesting question to ask now is, "How did Sarah react to this?" The bible records that she had no fear because she trusted God. If Abraham was the epitome (the best example) of the most selfish husband that ever lived, then Sarah is the epitome of the most godly wife. The Holy Spirit uses Sarah as the number one example of a godly wife.

1 Peter 3:1-6 NLT paraphrase

In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of [be submissive to] your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over <sup>2</sup> by observing your pure and reverent lives.

<sup>3</sup> Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewellery, or beautiful clothes. <sup>4</sup> You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle [meek, humble] and quiet [calm, peaceful, at rest] spirit, which is so precious to God.

<sup>5</sup> This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. <sup>6</sup> For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters [follow her godly example] when you **do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.**

v 5 **This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful:** Every wife is entered into God's beauty contest—measured by the degree of their humility and meekness demonstrated towards their husbands, and also their love for and trust in God. The good thing about God's beauty contest is that there is more than one winner—God wants every wife to trust Him, submit to their husbands, and in so doing, bring

much glory to Himself. Sarah wasn't a perfect wife, but the Scriptures graciously present her as being the best example of a godly wife in the entire Bible. Her beauty was not just outward—rather her beauty radiated out from within and only increased as her physical body aged.

v 5, 6 **They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands ... Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master:** This is a beautiful and succinct description of what it means for wives to submit to their husbands "*as unto the Lord*". Notice again that it's impossible for a wife to accept her husband's authority over her without her first putting her trust in God for His protection against her husbands sometimes or often selfish choices, choices that have deleterious or harmful effects on the wife and family.

v 6 **You are her daughters [follow her godly example] when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do:** Last time we learned that "perfect love drives out all fear"—*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love* (1 John 4:18). Sarah is used as an example of a godly wife; she submitted to her husband Abraham, not fearing what he would do, because she had first put her trust in God.

*If I love and trust God, then I won't fear those whose authority I am under, and will therefore be free to show love and kindness to them instead of reacting defensively and aggressively.*

Another way of saying this is: If I am loving God by putting Him first in my life, then I won't fear what man can do to me. However, if I love other things (including myself, pleasure, reputation, money, etc) more than God, then I will live in fear of what man might do to me.

Hebrew 13:5-6 NKJV

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." <sup>6</sup> So we **may** boldly say: "**The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?**"

v 6 **So we may boldly say:** I will only boldly say, "*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*" ***if*** I actually believe the promise in verse 5, "*For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*" Will I choose to trust God's promise?

### ***Other verses that refer to wives submitting to their own husbands***

There are two more Scriptures worth mentioning that relate to the wife submitting to her husband.

Colossians 3:18 AMP

Wives, be subject [submit] to your husbands [subordinate and adapt yourselves to them], as is right and fitting and your proper duty in the Lord.

Colossians 3:18 NKJV

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

v 18 **as is fitting in the Lord**: Here, the wife's submission is described in a similar way to what is written in Ephesians 5:22—"as unto the Lord".

Simply put, as we learned last time, God created the wife for the specific role of being the husband's helper (see Genesis 2:18). Therefore, it's the wife's duty to subordinate and adapt herself to be the best possible helper to her husband that she can be, so that he can be the best godly leader of the family that he can be. The better the husband leads, the more better off (strong, loving, obedient, joyful, godly, peaceful etc) the family will be. This is a win-win situation. Consider the following proverb.

Proverbs 14:1 NKJV

The wise [submissive] woman builds her house [family],  
But the foolish [rebellious] pulls it down with her hands.

Titus 2:4-5 NLT paraphrase

These older [believing] women must train the younger [believing] women to love their husbands and their children, <sup>5</sup> to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, **and to be submissive [obedient] to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.**

These verses in Titus add a warning to the command—the wife who is not **submissive and obedient** to her husband will **bring shame on the word of God**. First consider her children. How can the children be expected to follow God's moral law and obey their parents if the wife, who claims to be a Christian living according to the word of God, isn't setting the example by obeying her husband "as unto the Lord". Her bad example of rebellion and disobedience (the opposite of willing submission) will also be seen by others and will bring the word of God into disrepute in the community. The wife has the responsibility to demonstrate to her children and the world what godly submission looks like (we'll see the husband's roles and responsibilities later).

So far we have revised and expanded upon what it means for the wife to submit to her husband "as unto the Lord". Remember this summary statement:

***The godly wife will fearlessly and willingly submit to her own husband because her hope and trust are in God, not her husband.***

The wife who looks to find satisfaction and fulfillment primarily from her husband and/or family will be constantly disappointed. The same is true for the husband who thinks that getting married will solve all his problems. Married or not, we must all look first to God to meet our needs before we can give ourselves to others in genuine, selfless friendship. Then:

***Instead of expectation, there is liberation—the other person is free to be themselves in the marriage/friendship.***

## **2. Overcoming the old nature by the power of the Holy Spirit** **(Ephesians 5:8-10, 18-21)**

Now we will revise and remind ourselves of the practical aspects of submission—attitude and communication. **What we must understand is that when we are submitted to God, we are also empowered by God.** If you've got to this point, and you think that you're a failure, now is the time to start looking up—it's time to look beyond yourself to find the strength and ability to be a godly wife.

How is it possible to speak lovingly and gently, when the natural response of our sinful human nature is to resist and reject any authority over us? This natural mistrust and fear of being controlled by someone else, combined with the natural selfish desire we have to get our own way, produces an aggressive, self-centred and unsubmitive response towards the other person. Of course there can be no harmony, community, relationship or love in this kind of relationship where there is no willing submission. So what is the answer?

Last time we studied Ephesians 5:8-9 and 18-21 and saw that if I am being led, empowered, filled, or controlled by the Holy Spirit, then I will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Remember the fruit of the Holy Spirit is just the Spirit empowering us to do or live or walk the new desires that are in the new heart that God gave us when we were saved. Two of these desires of my new nature are to:

**1. “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father” (v 20)**

What we see here is that if we are being led by the Spirit, then we will be seeing things from the eternal perspective and not our own. We will remember that God is in control, that He loves us, and therefore, every circumstance is a part of His perfect plan for me.

**2. “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (v 19)**

What does this “new” or “light” nature communication sound like in practice? In the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul gives more detail.

Colossians 3:12-18 NKJV

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. <sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Our new nature, the new heart that God has given us (see Ezekiel 36:26-27) is so glorious, so beautiful. In contrast, our sinful nature is so ugly. The believer must always remember that the desires of the new nature can only be implemented when we are fully submitted to God—I’m either living my way or God’s way—there is no middle ground.

Let’s look at some verses that explain how we gain victory over our sinful nature by submitting to and depending on God.

James 4:7 NKJV

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Galatians 5:16-17 NLT paraphrase

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. <sup>17</sup> The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. <sup>18</sup> But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses [no longer operating by human effort, and therefore no longer under the control of my sinful nature].

Philippians 2:12b-13 NLT paraphrase

**Work hard** to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup> **For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.**

In what way does the believer have to work hard? By continually submitting to and resting in the Lord, using God's power to resist the strong sinful nature tendency to do things my way and by my own strength.

Galatians 2:20 NLT paraphrase

My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by [faith,] trusting in the Son of God,** who loved me and gave himself for me.

Romans 8:12-13 NLT paraphrase

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. <sup>13</sup> For if you live by its dictates, you will die. **But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature,** you will live.

What we see here is that it all starts with our decision to submit to God—The believer must continually remind themselves: I can't but God can! Everything else will come naturally and easily once we are "walking in the light", meaning we are living by or depending on the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

### **3. The role of a godly wife**

Aside from having a submissive attitude, what is the role of a godly wife in a marriage? Most of the following roles and attributes of a godly wife shouldn't just apply to wives, but to all women. For women, they are a goal to work towards, showing the kind of character she can develop as she grows in her relationship with God. For men, they are a guide as to the kind of wife the Christian man should seek after and pray for.

Titus 2:4-5 NLT paraphrase

<sup>4</sup> **These older women must train the younger women** to love their husbands and their children, <sup>5</sup> to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive [obedient] to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

The older or more mature wives or women in general have a very important and specific teaching role. They are to disciple or teach the less mature women (either new believers or newly married) to:

- **love their husbands and their children**—this is the phileo kind of love, shown by demonstrating affection and fondness.



- **live wisely**—prudent, wise, self-controlled, moderate, have good judgement
- **be pure**—holy, innocent, clean, modest, especially in a sexual sense.
- **work in their homes**—to carry out household duties, to be the steward of the home, a homemaker, one who takes care of the home
- **do good**—be gentle, kind, generous, noble
- **be obedient and submissive to their husbands**—“as unto the Lord”

The Proverbs 31 wife—in summary, a godly wife is a hard worker in the home who brings much blessing and gain to the husband as she diligently and wisely manages the home. It is good to recognise here the enormity of the task that the married woman has. Many wives manage the household finances, do most of the shopping, organise and repair clothes, provide and cook food, look after the children’s basic needs, and maintain the overall functioning of the home. This is not to say that all these things are solely the wife’s domain—a godly husband will be a servant leader, helping out around the home and taking seriously his role as the father of the children. However, the wife is described in Titus 2:4-5 as having the role or function of a homemaker—the day to day running of the home is something that the wife should focus on and take pride in. Of course it’s okay to swap some of these roles if the wife goes out to work and the husband stays at home to look after the children.

#### **4. The attributes of a godly wife**

An attribute is a quality or feature that is regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of somebody.

Titus 2:3 NLT paraphrase

Similarly, teach the older women **to live in a way that honours God**. They must **not slander others** or **be heavy drinkers**.

v 3 **To live in a way that honours God**: This means to be reverent or holy

v 3 **Not heavy drinkers**: Literally means to not be addicted to alcohol. This can be applied to any substance abuse.

v 3 **Not slander others**: Literally means not the devil or adversary. Practically it means that the wife doesn’t backbite or answer back. She can be trusted not to gossip or talk about other people behind their backs.

1 Timothy 3:11 NLT

In the same way, their wives must be **respected** and must **not slander others**. They must **exercise self-control** and **be faithful** in everything they do.

v 11 **Respected**: to be counted worthy of respect, honourable, held in honour, worthy, of good character.

v 11 **Exercise self-control**: sober, not given to wine/alcohol, self-controlled, level-headed, temperate, exercises moderation and self-restraint.

v 11 **Faithful**: dependable, trustworthy, reliable, unflinching.

1 Peter 3:1-6 NLT paraphrase

In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your **godly lives** will speak to them without any words. **They will be won over** <sup>2</sup> by observing your **pure and reverent lives**.

<sup>3</sup> **Don't be concerned about the outward beauty** of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewellery, or beautiful clothes. <sup>4</sup> **You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.** <sup>5</sup> This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They **put their trust in God** and **accepted the authority of their husbands**.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.

v 2 **They (the unbelieving husband) will be won over:** “The benefit of submission is shown in the way that it affects husbands for God. A wife's submission is a powerful expression of her trust in God. This kind of faith and obedience can accomplish great things, even **without using words.**” (David Guzik)

v 2 **Pure:** sexually and morally pure, innocent, modest dress.

v 2 **Reverent:** respectful. It is important that the wife respects her husband.

v 3 **Not concerned with outward beauty:** A godly wife doesn't spend excessive time on their outward appearance, and doesn't try to impress by appearance, dresses modestly (cover skin, not tight). Immodesty is a mark or symbol of insecurity.

v 4 **Unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God:** Outward beauty fades with age; we all grow old, grey, and wrinkly. But the inner beauty that comes from a increasing love for God only gets more and more attractive. Therefore, ladies, spend more time in your Bible and less time in front of the mirror.

v 4 **Gentle:** humble, considerate, meek, mild, soft

v 4 **Quiet:** peaceful, at rest, tranquil, well-ordered

v 5 **Put their trust in God:** When we trust God, we don't need to fear anyone or anything else. God will never let us down, even if the husband does. It's not sinful to move from one place to another, but moving for the wrong reason, or at the wrong time, or to the wrong place can be foolish. It's the foolish mistakes or decisions of the husband that God protects the wife from. The believing wife must always refuse to do anything that her unbelieving husband asks her to do that directly contradicts God's Word, like take drugs, watch worldly TV, have an abortion, steal, cheat on taxes etc.

v 5 **(willingly) accept the authority of their husband:** This is what genuine submission is, willingly accepting someone having authority over you. Jesus is our example. Jesus willingly accepted being under the Father's authority, and His motive for only doing and saying what the Father told Him to say and do was to **please the Father**, and not just because He had to.

Remember that the wife submits to her husband because God asks her to, and not because the husband is asking her to (*as unto the Lord*—it's God who is asking the wife to submit to her husband). The godly wife submits to her husband as part of her obedience to God.