

Ephesians 5:23-24 Commentary

PREVIOUS

EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH
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Ephesians 5:23 For the [husband](#) is the [head](#) of the [wife](#), as [Christ also](#) is the [head](#) of the [church](#), He [Himself](#) being the [Savior](#) of the [body](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [hoti aner estin \(3SPA1\)](#) [kephale tes gunaikos os kai o Christos kephale tes ekklesias, autos soter tou somatos](#)

Amplified: For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, Himself the Savior of [His] body. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: for the husband is the "head" of the wife in the same way that Christ is head of the Church and Saviour of the body. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: because a husband is head of the wife as the Christ is Head of the Church, He himself being the Saviour of the Body.

Young's Literal: because the husband is head of the wife, as also the Christ is head of the assembly, and he is Saviour of the body,

FOR THE HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE AS CHRIST ALSO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH: hoti aner estin (3SPA1) kephale tes gunaikos os kai o Christos kephale tes ekklesias:

- 1 Cor 11:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
- Ep 1:22,23; 4:15; Colossians 1:18
- [Ephesians Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: Spirit-Filled Families - 1](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 5:22-24 What! Me, Submit to Him?](#)- Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 5:18-22, 25: 6:1-2 A Plan for Your Family: God's vs. the World's - Part 2](#)- John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: God's Pattern for Wives-1](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: God's Pattern for Wives-2](#) - John MacArthur

For (see discussion of **terms of explanation**) Paul explains why the wife is to be subject to her own husband as to the Lord. He explains that the husband is the head of his wife, just as Christ (the Bridegroom) is the head of the Church (His Bride).

Husband is the head of the wife- The issue is order not superiority or inferiority.

Paul explains this spousal order to the Corinthians writing...

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (1Corinthians 11:3)

Clearly Paul is not saying the woman is inferior to the man, just as Christ is not inferior to His Father. Paul is speaking of a divine order that in context of this letter will create an environment in which the marital partners will be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (See **note** Ephesians 4:3)

Paul goes on to add that...

in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.¹² For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (1 Corinthians 11:11-12)

Men and women are interdependent, and women are not inferior to men since they give birth to all.

In Genesis it is quite clear that both men and women were created in God's image, Moses recording...

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Wayne Grudem has an interesting comment on the meaning of this verse...

If you ever meet an egalitarian (an evangelical feminist) claiming that the word **"head"** in the Bible doesn't mean **"authority"** but means **"source,"** you may wonder how to answer. Their purpose, of course, is to get rid

of the idea of authority in the family in verses like,

"The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (Ep 5:23).

So they claim that the word "**head**" (kephale) meant "source" rather than "authority" in the ancient world. Sometimes they quote some ancient Greek texts which, they say, show Zeus to be the "source" of all things, or Esau to be the "source" of his clan, or which mention the "head" of a river. For a verse about husbands and wives, even this idea makes no sense (I am not the source of my wife!), but they will usually then suggest a more specific meaning like "source of encouragement. .

(Grudem goes on) You claim that the Greek word for "head" means "source without the idea of authority." Will you please show me one example in all of ancient Greek where this word (kephale) is used to refer to a person and means what you claim, namely, "non-authoritative source"? In the Greek speaking world, to be the "head" of a group of people always meant to have authority over those people. Notice the egalitarian examples: Zeus is the chief of the Greek gods! Esau was the leader of the clan descended from him. These examples don't disprove the idea of authority; they confirm it. The example of "**head of a river**" doesn't prove "source without authority," because (1) this usage is not referring to a person at all, and (2) the example is misquoted for Eph. 5:23, because there "head" is singular, and "head" in the singular is in fact used to refer to the other end of the river, the "mouth," while only in the plural is it used of the "source" of the river (see the Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon, p. 945), and (3) in both cases it just means "end point," in the same way that it can refer to the "head of a column" or "head of a pole," and these examples have nothing to do with the ideas of "source" or "authority. I once looked up over 2,300 examples of the word "**head**" (kephale) in ancient Greek. In these texts the word kephale is applied to many people in authority, but to none without governing authority: the king of Egypt is called "head" of the nation/the general of an army is called the "head" of the army/ the Roman emperor is called the "head" of the people/the god Zeus is called the "head" of all things/David as king of Israel is called the "head" of the people/the leaders of the tribes of Israel are called "heads" of the tribes/the husband is the "head" of the wife/Christ is the "head" of the church/God the Father is the "head" of Christ. ([Vol. 1, No. 3 - Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#))

Christ also is the Head of the Church- This truth is reaffirmed elsewhere in Scripture.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as **head over all things to the church**, which is His **body**, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (See **notes** Ephesians 1:22; 1:23)

but speaking the truth in love, we (the church) are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the **head**, even **Christ**, (See **note** Ephesians 4:15)

He (Christ) is also **head of the body, the church**; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (See **note** Colossians 1:18)

Church (1577) (**ekklesia** from **ekkaléo** = call out in turn from **ek** = out + **kaleo**= call) literally "called-out ones". The Greeks used **ekklesia** for assembly of citizens called out to transact city business. The church is a living organism, composed of living members joined together; through which Christ works, carries out His purposes and He lives.

The Church is a spiritual organism entered by means of the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Everyone who has been saved belongs to the body of Christ, the universal church. The universal church is manifested in the world by individual local churches, each of which is to be a microcosm of the body of Christ. The church is to function under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, operating under His sovereign rule. Jesus Christ is the Founder and Lord of His church and has guaranteed its perpetuity until He returns.

HE HIMSELF *BEING* THE SAVIOR OF THE BODY: autos soter tou somatos:

- Ep 5:25,26; Acts 20:28; 1Th 1:10; Rev 5:9
- [Ephesians Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: Spirit-Filled Families - 1](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 5:22-24 What! Me. Submit to Him?](#)- Steven Cole
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He Himself... the Savior of the Body - this clause definitely emphasizes that although Christ resembles the husband in respect to

headship, at the same time He differs from the Husband by virtue of His role as Savior. The husband is not the "savior" of his wife. The husband is head of the wife and in that role he is like Christ.

Vincent writes that "in this particular the comparison between the husband as the head of the wife, and Christ as the head of the Church, does not hold. Hence Rev., properly, renders for and He is, being Himself; Himself separating the clause from what was previously said. The comparison lies in the fact of headship alone. The husband's love and protection cannot be called salvation, in which respect Christ's headship is peculiar to Himself. ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

Savior ([4990](#)) (**soter** from **sozo** = rescue from peril > from **saos** = safe; delivered) refers to the agent of salvation or deliverance, the one who rescues, delivers, saves and preserves. Anyone who saves or delivers can be called a deliverer or rescuer (a soter).

Soter is used of **God** as the source of salvation - the Deliverer, the Preserver, the Protector, the Healer, the One Who rescues man from danger or peril and unto a state of prosperity and happiness. **Soter** is used of **Jesus Christ** as the agent sent by God to bring deliverance to sinful mankind.

Ephesians 5:24 But as the **church** is **subject** to **Christ**, so also the **wives** ought to be to their **husbands** in **everything**. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [alla os e ekklesia hupotassetai \(3SPPI\) to Christo, houtos kai ai gunaikes tois andrasin en panti.](#)

Amplified: As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: The willing subjection of the Church to Christ should be reproduced in the submission of wives to their husbands. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: Nevertheless, as the Church subjects itself in obedience to the Christ, in this manner also the wives should subject themselves in obedience to their husbands in all things.

Young's Literal: but even as the assembly is subject to Christ, so also are the wives to their own husbands in everything.

BUT AS THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT TO CHRIST: alla os e ekklesia hupotassetai (3SPPI) to Christa

- [Ephesians Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: Spirit-Filled Families - 1](#) - Wayne Barber
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But (see value of interrogating this **term of contrast**) - Paul continues his explanation of why the husband is the head of the wife, reiterating this truth in the form of an exhortation, this sense being conveyed in several translations...

As the church is subject to Christ, so **let wives also be subject** in everything to their husbands. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Church ([1577](#)) (**ekklesia** from **ekkaléo** = call out in turn from **ek** = out + **kaleo** = call) literally "called-out ones". The Greeks used **ekklesia** for assembly of citizens called out to transact city business. The church is a living organism, composed of living members joined together; through which Christ works, carries out His purposes and He lives.

Everyone who has been saved belongs to the body of Christ, the universal church. The universal church is manifested in the world by individual local churches, each of which is to be a microcosm of the body of Christ. The church is to function under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, operating under His sovereign rule. Jesus Christ is the Founder and Lord of His church and has guaranteed its perpetuity until He returns.

Subject ([5293](#)) (**hupotasso** from **hupó** = under + **tasso** = arrange in orderly manner) means literally to place under in an orderly

fashion. In the active voice **hupotasso** means to subject, bring under firm control, subordinate as used in (see **note** Ro 8:20)

Hupotásso means to submit (to yield to governance or authority), to place in subjection. **Hupotasso** is in the **present tense** calling of this to be this habitual practice of Spirit filled wife. The verb is in the passive voice with a middle **sense** which signifies the **voluntary subjection** of oneself to the will of another. Husbands and wives both need to understand the **voluntary** nature of the submission called for in the marital relationship lest it be misapplied.

Hupotásso was a military term meaning that troop divisions were to be arranged in a military fashion under the command of the leader. In this state of subordination they were now subject to the orders of their commander. Thus, it speaks of the subjection of one individual under another. **Hupotasso** was also used to describe the arrangement of military implements on a battlefield in order that one might carry out effective warfare!

Christ ([5547](#)) (**Christos** from **chrío** = to anoint, rub with oil, consecrate to an office) is the Anointed One, the Messiah, **Christos** being the Greek equivalent of the transliterated Hebrew word Messiah.

SO ALSO THE WIVES OUGHT TO BE TO THEIR HUSBANDS IN EVERYTHING: houtos kai ai gunaikes tois andrasin en panti.:

- Eph 5:33; Exodus 23:13; 29:35; Colossians 3:20,22; Titus 2:7,9
- [Ephesians 5:22-24: Spirit-Filled Families - 1](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 5:22-24 What! Me, Submit to Him?](#) - Steven Cole
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To their husbands in everything - While submission is in one sense limitless (wives are to submit "in everything"), in another sense this submission is not to exceed the parameters of the will of God, for this submission has the important qualifier "as to the Lord"! (see **note** Ephesians 5:22).

Wayne Barber emphasizes that submission of a wife to a husband has to be supernatural because of a desire that was introduced into women when Adam sinned...

Now, this is not the easiest thing for a wife to do. I want to tell you why it is so difficult. In **Genesis 3:16** is talking about the curse of original sin and referring specifically to the woman. Ladies, do you wonder why some things are difficult in your life, particularly bearing children? Here we go.

To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your **desire** shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'

Now that word translated as "**desire**" almost makes it look like that desire is emotional (Ed note: sexual desire). The Hebrew word "**desire**" has a root that in this context means to seek control over or to master your husband.

Look in Genesis 4:7 where the same Hebrew word is used and it helps what it means.

"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its **desire** is for you, but you must master it." (NIV) (**Ed note:** See more discussion of the meaning of this Hebrew word in the following note).

In other words, sin's **desire** is to master you, but you must master sin. So the word desire... means that because of Adam, woman have in their fallen flesh, the desire to rule over their husband.

This is why it is so important to follow God's design in the marriage. Paul begins with wives for the Scripture says that wives, from Eve on, have had a desire within them to control and run over a man.

Wives you may be more educated, more gifted, more vibrant in your personality and you are a whole lot prettier, but you need to die to that and be filled with the Spirit of God. Until you as the wife are filled with the Spirit of God, there is no ability within you to control that urge that comes from Adam to take control and to dominate. You can't control it. But remember, He will strengthen you with power in the inner man to do what you never could do before when you were willing to accommodate Him and say, "God, this is Your design. I don't like it particularly, but I choose to do it." God says, "Great. I will meet you at the point of your obedience and will do something in you that will blow you away. I will fill you to the fulness of God." You see, only when a

wife is submitting to the Lord Jesus and to her husband can the family ever have any hope of being functional. God's design is God's design. (Ephesians 5:25-31: Spirit-Filled Families - 2)

The **NET Bible Notes** explain the meaning of the Hebrew word for **desire** in **Genesis 3:16** ("and toward your husband [will be] your desire.")...

The nominal sentence does not have a verb; a future verb must be supplied, because the focus of the oracle is on the future struggle. The precise meaning of the noun Hebrew noun "**desire**". Many interpreters conclude that it refers to sexual desire here, because the subject of the passage is the relationship between a wife and her husband, and because the word is used in a romantic sense in Song 7:11 HT (7:10 ET). However, this interpretation makes little sense in Gen 3:16.

First, it does not fit well with the assertion "he will dominate you."

Second, it implies that sexual desire was not part of the original creation, even though the man and the woman were told to multiply.

And third, it ignores the usage of the word in Ge 4:7 where it refers to sin's desire to control and dominate Cain. (Even in Song of Songs it carries the basic idea of "control," for it describes the young man's desire to "have his way sexually" with the young woman.)

In Gen 3:16 the Lord announces a struggle, a conflict between the man and the woman. She will **desire to control him**, but he will dominate her instead. This interpretation also fits the tone of the passage, which is a judgment oracle. See further Susan T. Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" WTJ 37 (1975): 376-83. ([NET Bible Notes](#)) (Bolding added)

Commenting on the male's tendency to "**rule over**" the woman, the **NET Bible notes** state that...

The Hebrew verb **masal** means "**to rule over**," but in a way that emphasizes powerful control, domination, or mastery. This also is part of the baser human nature. The translation assumes the imperfect verb form has an objective/indicative sense here. Another option is to understand it as having a modal, desiderative nuance, "but he will want to dominate you." In this case, the Lord simply announces the struggle without indicating who will emerge victorious.

This passage is a judgment oracle. **It announces that conflict between man and woman will become the norm in human society.** It does not depict the NT ideal, where the husband sacrificially loves his wife, as Christ loved the church, and where the wife recognizes the husband's loving leadership in the family and voluntarily submits to it. **Sin produces a conflict or power struggle between the man and the woman**, but in Christ man and woman call a truce and live harmoniously (Eph 5:18-32). ([NET Bible Notes](#)) (Bolding added)