

Ephesians 5:21-33 (NIV)

Instructions for Christian Households

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^[a] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”^[b] ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 5:26](#) Or *having cleansed*
- b. [Ephesians 5:31](#) Gen. 2:24

Ephesians 5:15-21 (HCSB)

²¹ submitting to one another
in the fear of Christ.

Wives and Husbands

²² Wives, submit^[a] to your own husbands as to the Lord, ²³ for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^[b] her with the washing of water by the word. ²⁷ He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ since we are members of His body.^[c]

³¹ For this reason a man will leave
his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two will become one flesh.^[d]

³² This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 5:22](#) Other mss omit *submit*
- b. [Ephesians 5:26](#) Or *having cleansed*
- c. [Ephesians 5:30](#) Other mss add *and of His flesh and of His bones*
- d. [Ephesians 5:31](#) [Gn 2:24](#)

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹
Ephesians 5:21-33

5:19-21 The Spirit's fullness is demonstrated in spiritual understanding, praise, and thanksgiving that are constant and comprehensive. The church that is filled with the Spirit will be characterized by praise and thanksgiving to God. Beyond that there will be evidence of self-control, mutual encouragement, and mutual submission, which is the opposite of rudeness, haughtiness, and self-assertion.

5:21 This verse serves as a hinge to connect what is prior with what follows. Grammatically, the participial phrase (lit "submitting yourselves") goes with [verses 18-20](#). The content of [verses 22-33](#), however, depends on the principle of submission in [verse 21](#).

5:22 Wives submit directs wives to be submissive to their own (Gk *idios*; "one's own") husbands (cp. [Col 3:18-4:1](#)). The distinctive feature here is that the relationship between husband and wife is compared with that between Christ and the church. No verb is in the original language of [verse 22](#). The imperative "submit" is understood from [verse 21](#).

5:22-24 Paul addressed wives first. They were to be voluntarily submissive to their husbands. No external coercion should be involved, nor should submission imply that the wife is a lesser partner in the marital union. The submission is governed by the phrase **as to the Lord**. Christian wives' submission to their husbands is one aspect of their obedience to Christ. Submission is a person's yielding his or her own rights and losing self for another. Submission is patterned after Christ's example ([Php 2:5-8](#)) and reflects the essence of the gospel. Submission distinguishes the lifestyle of all Christians.

5:25 Paul turned to the duties of husbands. The society in which Paul wrote recognized the duties of wives to husbands but not necessarily of husbands to wives. As in [Col 3:19](#), Paul exhorted husbands to love their wives, but Ephesians presents Christ's self-sacrificing love for the church as the pattern for the husband's love for his wife.

Husbands are to love their wives continually as Christ loves the church. The tense of the Greek word translated "love" indicates a love that continues. Love is more than family affection or sexual passion. Rather it is a deliberate attitude leading to action that concerns itself with another's well-being. A husband should love his wife: (1) as Christ loved the church ([vv. 25-27](#)); (2) as his own body ([vv. 28-30](#)); and (3) with a love transcending all other human relationships ([vv. 31-33](#)).

5:26-27 Cleansing her with the washing of water: Paul explains more fully the result of Christ's atonement for the church: it makes the church holy and pure. The purpose of Christ's giving himself up for the church is the church's sanctification and cleansing.

5:28 Since **husbands are to love** their wives as Christ loved the church, they give up their personal rights for the good of their wives. It is a solemn picture of covenant love.

5:29-30 On first sight, Paul seems to have descended from the lofty standard of Christ's love to the low standard of self-love when he says **no one ever hates his own flesh**, but he reminded Christian couples of their oneness, their "one-flesh" relationship. For this reason a husband's obligation to cherish his wife as he does his own body is more than a helpful guide. His sacrificial love is an expression of the sacred marital union. True love is evidenced when husbands and wives have this spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 5".

5:31-32 Paul appealed to [Gen 2:24](#), which is God's initial statement in the Scriptures regarding marriage. The marriage commitment takes precedence over every other human relationship.

5:31 **One flesh** means closely joined. It hallows the biblical standard of covenantal heterosexual marital relations and excludes polygamy and adultery. What is primarily a divine ordinance graciously and lovingly is designed for mutual satisfaction and delight.

5:33 **Love... respect** concludes and restates this section's theme. The husband's ultimate responsibility is to love his wife with a Christlike love.

English Standard Version - Study Bible²
Ephesians 5:21-33

5:22-33 Wives and Husbands. The first example of general submission ([v. 21](#)) is illustrated as Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands ([vv. 22-24](#), [33](#)). Husbands, on the other hand, are not told to submit to their wives but to love them ([vv. 25-33](#)).

5:22 submit. Paul's first example of general submission from [v. 21](#) is the right ordering of the marriage relationship (see also [Col. 3:18](#); [1 Pet. 3:1-7](#)). The submission of wives is not like the obedience children owe parents, nor does this text command all women to submit to all men (**to your own husbands**, not to all husbands!). Both genders are equally created in God's image ([Gen. 1:26-28](#)) and heirs together of eternal life ([Gal. 3:28-29](#)). This submission is in deference to the ultimate leadership of the husband for the health and harmonious working of the marriage relationship.

5:23-24 the husband is the head of the wife. This is the grounds of the wife's submission to her husband and is modeled on Christ's headship over the church. Just as Christ's position as **head of the church** and **its Savior** does not vary from one culture to another, neither does the headship of a husband in relation to his wife and her duty to submit to her husband **in everything**. "Head" (Gk. *kephalē*) here clearly refers to a husband's authority over his wife and cannot mean "source," as some have argued. In fact, there is no sense in which husbands are the source of their wives either physically or spiritually. In addition, in over 50 examples of *kephalē* in ancient Greek literature, with the idea "person A is the head of person(s) B," person A has authority over person(s) B in every case (see also [1:22](#); [Col. 2:10](#); see note on [1 Cor. 11:3](#)).

5:25 love. Paul now turns to the duty of husbands. He does not command the husband to submit to his wife but instead tells the husband that he must give **himself up for her**. Thus, husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificial manner, following the example of Christ, who "gave himself up for" the church in loving self-sacrifice. Clearly the biblical picture of a husband laying down his life for his wife is directly opposed to any kind of male tyranny or oppression. The husband is bound by love to ensure that his wife finds their marriage a source of rich fulfillment and joyful service to the Lord. Notably, Paul devotes three times more space to the husband's duty (nine verses) than to the wife's (three verses).

5:26-27 The focus in these verses is on Christ, for husbands do not "sanctify" their wives or "wash" them of their sins, though they are to do all in their power to promote their wives' holiness. **Sanctify** here means to consecrate into the Lord's service through cleansing. **washing of water**. This might be a reference to baptism, since it is common in the Bible to speak of invisible, spiritual things (in this case, spiritual cleansing) by pointing to an outward physical sign of them (see [Rom. 6:3-4](#); and note on [John 4:15](#)). There may also be a link here to [Ezek. 16:1-13](#), where the Lord washes infant Israel, raises her, and eventually elevates her to royalty and marries her, which would correspond to presenting **the church to himself in splendor** at his marriage supper (see also [Ezek. 36:25](#); [Rev. 19:7-9](#); [21:2](#), [9-11](#)). **without blemish**. The church's utter holiness and moral perfection will be consummated in resurrection glory, but is derived from the consecrating sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

5:28-30 Paul reiterates a husband's calling to self-sacrificial love for his wife by comparing this love to regard for one's own body (**their own bodies**), **himself**, and **his own flesh** ([vv. 28-29](#); see also [v. 33](#)) and then to Christ's love for his body. As [vv. 29-30](#) make explicit, the "body" for which Christ sacrificed himself was not his own person but the "body" which is the church.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 5".

5:31 one flesh. The command for a husband to love his wife as he loves “his own flesh” ([v. 29](#)) originates in the creation reality that God joins husbands and wives together to “become one flesh.” Paul’s quotation is from [Gen. 2:24](#), speaking of marriage before there was any sin in the world; see also [Matt. 19:5](#); [Mark 10:8](#); [1 Cor. 6:16](#).

5:32 By **mystery** Paul means the hidden plan of God that has come to fulfillment in Christ Jesus (see [1:9](#); [3:3-4](#), [9](#); and [6:19](#)), thus his quotation about marriage from [Genesis 2](#) (in [Eph. 5:31](#)) ties in to the relationship between Christ and his church. Paul’s meaning is **profound**: he interprets the original creation of the husband-and-wife union as itself modeled on Christ’s forthcoming union with the church as his “body” (see [v. 23](#)). Therefore, marriage from the beginning of creation ([Genesis 1](#)) was created by God to be a reflection of and patterned after Christ’s relation to the church. Thus Paul’s commands regarding the roles of husbands and wives do not merely reflect the culture of his day but present God’s ideal for all marriages at all times, as exemplified by the relationship between the bride of Christ (the church) and Christ himself, the Son of God.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Ephesians 5:21-33

5:22-24 In Paul's day, women, children, and slaves were to submit to the head of the family: Slaves would submit until they were freed, male children until they grew up, and women and girls their whole lives. Paul emphasized the equality of all believers in Christ ([Galatians 3:28](#)), but he did not suggest overthrowing Roman society to achieve it. Instead, he counseled all believers to submit to one another by choice—wives to husbands and also husbands to wives; slaves to masters and also masters to slaves; children to parents and also parents to children. This kind of mutual submission preserves order and harmony in the family, while it increases love and respect among family members.

5:22-24 Although some people have distorted Paul's teaching on submission by giving unlimited authority to husbands, we cannot get around it: Paul told wives to submit to their husbands. The fact that a teaching is not popular is no reason to discard it. One way to disarm the antagonism that the external culture may inject into the marriage relationship is to remember that the wife gets to submit and the husband gets to die. According to the Bible, the man is the spiritual head of the family, and his wife should acknowledge his leadership. But real spiritual leadership involves loving service (a form of dying). Just as Christ served the disciples, even to the point of washing their feet, so the husband is to serve his wife. A wise and Christ-honoring husband will not take advantage of his leadership role, and a wise and Christ-honoring wife will not try to undermine her husband's leadership. Either approach causes disunity and friction in marriage.

5:22-28 Why did Paul tell wives to submit and husbands to love? Perhaps Christian women, newly freed in Christ, found submission difficult; perhaps Christian men, used to the Roman custom of giving unlimited power to the head of the family, were not used to treating their wives with respect and love. Of course both husbands and wives should submit to each other ([5:21](#)), just as both should love each other.

5:25ff Some Christians have thought that Paul was negative about marriage because of the counsel he gave in [1 Corinthians 7:32-38](#). These verses in Ephesians, however, show a high view of marriage. Here marriage is not a practical necessity or a cure for lust, but a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church! Why the apparent difference? Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians was designed for a state of emergency during a time of persecution and crisis. Paul's counsel to the Ephesians is more the biblical ideal for marriage. Marriage, for Paul, is a holy union, a living symbol, a precious relationship that needs tender, self-sacrificing care.

5:25-30 Paul devotes twice as many words to telling husbands to love their wives as to telling wives to submit to their husbands. How should a man love his wife? (1) He should be willing to sacrifice everything for her, (2) make her well being of primary importance, and (3) care for her as he cares for his own body. No wife needs to fear submitting to a man who treats her in this way.

5:26, 27 Christ's death makes the church holy and clean. He cleanses us from the old ways of sin and sets us apart for his special sacred service ([Hebrews 10:29](#); [13:12](#)). Christ cleansed the church by the washing of baptism. Through baptism we are prepared for entrance into the church just as ancient Near Eastern brides were prepared for marriage by a ceremonial bath. It is God's Word that cleanses us ([John 17:17](#); [Titus 3:5](#)).

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2008-2009.

God's Armor For Us	
We are engaged in a spiritual battle—all believers find themselves subject to the devil's attacks because they are no longer on the devil's side. Thus, Paul tells us to use every <i>piece</i> of God's armor to resist the devil's attacks and to stand true to God in the midst of those attacks	
<i>Piece of Armor</i>	<i>Application</i>
Belt	The devil fights with lies, and sometimes his lies <i>sound</i> like truth; but only believers have God's truth, which can defeat the devil's lies.
Body armor	The devil often attacks our heart—the seat of our emotions, self-worth, and trust. God's righteousness is the body armor that protects our heart and ensures his approval. He approves of us because he loves us and sent his Son to die for us.
Shoes	The devil wants us to think that telling others the Good News is a worthless and hopeless task—the size of the task is too big and the negative responses are too much to handle. But the shoes God gives us are the motivation to continue to proclaim the true peace that is available in God—news everyone needs to hear.
Shield	What we see are the devil's attacks in the form of insults, setbacks, and temptations. But the shield of faith protects us from the devil's fiery arrows. With God's perspective, we can see beyond our circumstances and know that ultimate victory is ours.
Helmet	The devil wants to make us doubt God, Jesus, and our salvation. The helmet protects our mind from doubting God's saving work for us.
Sword	The sword is the only weapon of <i>offense</i> in this list of armor. There are times when we need to take the offensive against the devil. When we are tempted, we need to trust in the truth of God's Word.

[5:31-33](#) The union of husband and wife merges two persons in such a way that little can affect one without also affecting the other. Oneness in marriage does not mean losing your personality in the personality of the other. Instead, it means caring for your spouse as you care for yourself, learning to anticipate his or her needs, helping the other person become all he or she can be. The creation story tells of God's plan that husband and wife should be one ([Genesis 2:24](#)), and Jesus also referred to this plan ([Matthew 19:4-6](#)).