

Learning to Fly in Formation
Becoming Your Husband's Best Wingman

Ephesians 5:22-23

Have you ever gone to an airshow and watched a highly trained team of pilots fly in formation. I'm talking something like the Air Force Thunderbirds, or the Blue Angels. These planes can fly hundreds of miles per hour while performing complex, acrobatic maneuvers, all in formation, while just a few feet from each other's wingtips.

It is an amazing sight to behold. Breathtaking. They seem defy death and physics at every turn. The whole time, you're wondering, "how do they not hit each other?" I mean one wrong move and you are looking at two or three massive fireballs.

But it isn't just these demonstration teams that fly in formation. And it isn't just for showmanship that pilots do this. From the very beginning of flight, armed forces began experimenting with different formations, and they found that depending on the formation, they could fly further or faster like a flock of geese flying south for the winter. They could more easily defend bombers or defend their airspace

So, how do they make these formations work? In each formation there is a leader, and the rest are wingmen. Even in the most basic formation of two jets, there is a leader and there is a wingman. The wingman lines up on the leader, and moves in relative formation to the leader. They are not flying off of instruments or something on the horizon. But they fly by lining up off the leader. What the leader does, they do. Where the leader goes, they go. And by keeping in formation, they better fulfill their mission.

This is the kind of thing that Paul had in mind when he wrote these words:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Eph. 5:22-24

Paul is painting a picture of marriage where the husband, as a loving leader seeking to protect and provide for his family, takes lead, and his wife is his wingman. She lines up with him in perfect formation, so they can go further, go faster, and do their mission better. They move as one, in perfect synchronicity. She turns when he turns. She goes where he goes. All in pursuit of a mission they want to accomplish together.

These verses are among the most controversial and debated of any in the Bible. People fear that this is an excuse for sexism and chauvinism. It is justification for the oppression of

women. But submission was never designed to subject the wife to the husband, but to line up the husband and wife together for a common purpose.

But Paul never called women to become a doormat for a brute. He called women to submit to husbands who are called to be loving leaders, men who give themselves up for their wives, men of character who protect and provide for their wives in a way that is sacrificial, enriching, and caring. The husband is called to be a Christ-like leader. The wife is called to be a church-like supporter. These verses, when properly understood and applied, do not spell the end of a wife's happiness and identity, rather they bring them within her grasp. This morning we want to look at the goal of submission as well as God's design in submission.

I. The Goal of Submission

Definition of Submission

To understand the goal of submission what we first need to do is take a close look at the word itself. Submission is a loaded term, and we bring our experiences and baggage to it. The Greek word Paul uses here is *hupotasso* which means "to line up under," or "to place under." Originally, this was a military term meaning to place under in an orderly fashion.

Paul's readers who would have seen Roman troops marching in formation would readily understand the picture here. Roman troops moved according to strict formations. This was especially true when marching into battle. The practice of most ancient commanders was to simply throw their troops into battle en masse and hope the either superior numbers, better training, or simple luck would win the day. Roman military doctrine changed all this. They had specific formations in pursuit of well-thought out strategies. Roman commanders believed strongly in the idea that by keeping their troops in others, one could fight more effectively. So they would have formations with cavalry, heavy infantry and light infantry. Each cohort had a place and a purpose, and they were to keep their place in formation.

That was submission. It doesn't mean one cohort was more important or valuable than another, but together they could achieve a common goal. *Hupotasso* connoted support, allegiance, and cooperation. Paul is portraying the marriage as a well-organized, well-run military unit where every soldier understood his role and filled it and everyone worked as a team. That's why the planes flying in formation are the perfect example of this.

Submission is not blind obedience but willing cooperation. Notice that the word *obey* is not used of wives. Paul could have used that word. In 6:1 Children are told to *obey* and in 6:5

slaves are told to *obey* their masters. That's a different word used in those verses. It means to listen in order to obey. It communicates a sense of superiority. But that's not the word he uses here for wives. Instead, wives are told to submit, which means to line up under the husband's godly leadership, to support, encourage, and assist the husband in accomplishing God's purposes in the home. The wife is not a servant who stands around awaiting her husband's command. It does not mean you become a doormat for you husband. Let me tell you three things submission is.

1. Submission is Internal

First of all, Submission is Internal. Okay, grammar warning, but this important. This command in the Greek is given in the middle voice. This simply means that submission is an action that the wife does themselves. Look at the text. Who does the submitting? It is the wife.. This is an action she is doing on her own. It is internal

Submission works from the inside out. It can't be forced from the outside. This means that the husband cannot coerce his wife to submit. We cannot read this passage as, "husbands, make your wives submit." Guys, this is not your place or purpose. Shame on those men who have used this verse to give their abuse and oppression of their wives a biblical badge of approval.

Submission never means that a believing wife supports or tolerates her husband's sin. She must obey God rather than men. As far as she can without violating her faithfulness to Christ, she submits to his leadership. This applies even to those with unbelieving husbands. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:1-3, "*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*" Her respect for him, might actually lead him to Christ. Do you think a Christian wife with an unbelieving husband will win him over by being forceful, obnoxious, and contentious?

Let me also say that submission never requires a wife to suffer abuse at the hands of her husband. A husband is to protect and to provide, not to abuse. A wife with an abusive jerk as a husband has every right to seek safety for herself and her children. In fact, by holding him accountable for his evil, wicked behavior she may set him on a course that will change his life, and help him become the husband he should be. Nothing about "submit" means "be a victim."

So what's God doing here? What's the point in all of this? Marriage is the workshop where God performs his craftsmanship to shape the Christian life. When God asks me to love my

wife and give myself up for her, he is hammering and chiseling at my heart, shaping me into the godly man he asks me to be. He's shaping me on the inside. When he asks my wife to submit to me, he is sawing and sanding away at Teresa's heart, shaping her into the godly woman he wants her to be. He's shaping her on the inside.

We need to see that God is asking both husband and wife to surrender to each other. This doesn't only go one way. True, he asks wives to submit to their husbands, but he turns right around asks that husbands love our wives like Christ loved the church and give ourselves up for her. Wives, he asks you to submit. Husbands, he asks you to die for her! The reason he does this is because the home is where we first really learn to live our Christian principles. I can fake it at church for a couple of hours, but I can't fake it with my wife. And so God shapes us in the home.

Look at verse 21. It says "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Submission is something that God calls all of us to do. This is a description of who we are and what we do in the church. We willingly and freely set our wants aside for the sake of each other. If husbands can't learn to do that for their wives, and wives can't learn to do that for their husbands, how will we ever do that for each other? It is something we first learn and live in the home. The home is God's workshop where he shapes us on the inside into the people he wants us to be.

2. Submission is Personal

If submission is internal, than that must mean it comes from the heart. It is personal. It's not biblical submission if you go along outwardly, but you secretly hope for him to fall, or make a mistake. Biblical submission cannot be this way. A Godly woman doesn't bide her time awaiting the opportunity to say, "I told you so." She doesn't seek to use her husband's past failures as leverage to build up her own position. Rather, she seeks to build up his abilities as a Godly leader.

Biblical submission springs from the heart. The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3 also tells wives to submit to their own husbands, and he defines submission as an inner quality that springs from a wife's heart. He says, "*And let not your adornment be merely external-braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*"

Ladies, fashionable wardrobes, fancy hairstyles, and jewelry are not what makes you more of a woman according to God. What is precious to God is a gentle and quiet spirit. The

word for "precious" was the same one Greeks used to refer to expensive jewelry. Peter is saying that it is the woman with a submissive heart that is precious treasure to God. This quality is lasting. This kind of beauty doesn't go out of style, or fade as you age. All the treasure in so many fashion magazines that so many women think is essential to their identity will be garage sale and resell shop material in just a couple of years.

And ladies, let me say this as a guy. If you're ugly on the inside, it doesn't matter what you do to the outside. There are women who at first seem quite beautiful, but as you get to know them, they become uglier and uglier. On the other hand, there are women who seem quite plain at first, but on seeing their sweet spirit and gentle heart, they become very attractive. The inside overrides the outside every time.

3. Submission is Spiritual

Submission is personal. It is internal, and thirdly, it is spiritual. When a wife submits to her husband it is a deeply spiritual act. Here's why I say this. What is her motive in submitting to her husband? I call it the Christ-motive. He says wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands "as to the Lord," or "in reverence to Christ."

A wife submits, not in service to her husband, but in service to her Savior. Submission is something a wife owes to her Lord, not to her husband. Ladies, you submit because Jesus deserves it, not because your husband does. Submission is a way of honoring Christ Himself. In the parallel passage in Paul's sister letter to the Colossians he puts it this way, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as fitting in the Lord," or "as is appropriate in the Lord."

Submission is a matter of Christian faithfulness and obedience. Wives are to submit to their husbands as though they were submitting to Christ himself. This is not a blind obedience to the husband; rather it is having one's eyes wide open to Christ and seeking His glory. In this view, a wife is not a doormat for her husband, but rather a pedestal for the glory of Christ. Submission is an act of honor. It honors your husband, yes. But more than that, it honors God and His Word. And it brings honor to your own character.

The Christ-motive shows that the ultimate reward for submission comes not from the husband, but from Christ. When a wife submits to her husband, Christ will honor and bless her, whether her husband does or not. Wives, when you submit, you are not losing out on anything, but gaining what only Christ can give.

II. The Design of Submission

Now, why did God design marriage this way? Why does he ask wives to do this? Submission is not some arbitrary rule, but a part of God's design for marriage.

It is important that marriage have a design or pattern. Without it there would be only chaos and confusion in the home. God sovereignly decided how the home is to be structured. He did this in His infinite wisdom without giving us all the reasons why. He did not leave it up to us to decide, and we are best off when we follow His design. It rids the home of disorder, division, and strife. Paul tells us this design is based on two things.

A. God's Design in Marriage is Based on Creation

Paul didn't just make this up when he wrote this letter, but it goes all the way back to the beginning. When Paul says, "for the husband is the head of the wife" in verse 23 he is pointing back to creation. He quotes Genesis in verse 31.

He expands on this in more detail elsewhere. In first Corinthians 11 Paul writes, "*But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the wife...For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake* (vss. 3,8,9)." This points back to Genesis where God told Adam He would make for him a suitable helper and then out of one of his ribs He made Eve.

In Genesis we find that the woman was created after the man, for the man, from the man. Woman was presented to the man and named by the man. Again, let me stress, this points to a difference in functions and role, not in value and worth. Both men and women are created by God. Both are created in his image. Spiritually speaking, there is no difference. Paul himself wrote that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). God's design in marriage was that the husband loves her and leads her like Jesus, and the wife faithfully supports and empowers him in that role. That is Biblical submission. Wives need to find every possible way to enable their husbands in that direction. Honor every positive choice. Thank him for every act of provision. Praise him when he defends the marriage and family. Stand by him when he has to make tough choices for the family. Proudly call him "your man" and don't let others undermine him. Endure some of his lesser times with grace and sweetness. Don't use those times as an opportunity to belittle him, or say, "I knew it. I knew you'd blow it. I told you so."

B. God's Design in Marriage is Based on Redemption

Creation isn't the only pattern for submission, but Paul says Christ's redemption and

relationship with the church is also a model. Husbands, as the head, take their cues from Christ, but wives are to take their cues from the church. If some of you are still having a hard time accepting this teaching, let me ask you this: Does it bother you that God is the head of Christ? Does it bother you that Christ is the head of the church? Then why does it bother us that the husband is the head of the wife? Two reasons: his sinful nature and your sinful nature.

God has given husbands authority, but they are first and foremost men under authority, Christ's authority. A good leader in the home, must first be a good follower of Christ. The quality of a husband's leadership is based on the quality of his followership. Jesus never uses His headship to stifle or crush, but to enrich, love, and bless.

“Authority” in Scripture is not seen as a position of tyranny or domination, but one of responsibility and concern. Biblical leaders do not lead by decree or pronouncement, but through service and love. And in the same way the church responds to this kind of leadership from Christ, a woman is to respond to her husband. Notice that in the last part of verse 23 the focus of Christ's headship of the church is not to be her dominator, but her protector, provider, leader, and lover. Husbands, we are to love our wives in same way.

Women will be drawn to this kind of Godly leadership. Women long for men who will be godly providers, protectors, leaders and lovers in the home. They will gladly submit to that kind of leadership. And submission empowers that kind leadership. Wives, you want to make the godly leader come out of your man. Gladly submit to his godly leadership. Praise his godly decisions. Thank him for the sacrifices he makes. When he dies to himself to serve you you're your children, you tell that man how much that means to you. Tell him how much you appreciate him getting up and taking the family to church. If you had to drag him with you, then thank him for coming.

Don't belittle him for how puny his efforts are. Don't beat him up for not being spiritual enough. Find the little things and build those up. Ladies, I'll tell you what will kill godly leadership in your husband, and that's an obstinate, stubborn, pigheaded wife who belittles and berates everything her husband tries to do. “You can't do that. That'll never work. That's such a stupid idea.” Wives who say these kinds of things to the husbands are strangling whatever potential godly leadership might be in their man. And they aren't just killing the godly leader in their man, and they are killing their own marriage. They are killing themselves. You want a man who comes home and just vegges out in front of the TV, the computer, or only wants to hang

out with his friends. You do this to him, and you will never have a godly leader in your home.

Wives, be your husband's best wingman. Fly in formation with him. Or you can keep trying to work against each other. You can keep undermining each other. You can keep trying to go two different directions in your marriage, and then watch your home pull apart at the seams. Too many wives, instead of being their husband's best wingman, are constantly trying to shoot him down. You do that, and watch your family become vulnerable to every threat. Affairs, communication problems, financial troubles, problems with your kids, their choices and their friends. It's all going to hit. You can only take those enemies on flying as a team. The choice is yours.

As a couple, you've been given a mission. Together, you come up with a way to fulfill that mission, and then you fly together as a team. You move as one. You act as one. You will go further. You will go faster. You will conquer the airspace around your family. You will defend your home against all threats. Submission is to support, encourage, and cooperate with your husband in fulfilling God's will in your home.