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Week 14: The Role and Priorities of the Wife Ephesians 5: 22-24

A woman who properly submits to her husband also submits to the Lord.



Because so much of the Church has long disregarded the full teaching of the Scriptures, many believers find some of its truths to be unfamiliar and even hard to accept. And because the Church has been so engulfed in, identified with, and victimized by worldly standards, **God's** standards seem to be out-of-date, irrelevant, and offensive to modern thinking. **His** way is so high and contrary to the way of the world that it is incomprehensible to many in and out of the Church. Over and over again the B'rit Chadashah calls us to another dimension of existence, a new way of thinking, acting and living. To **walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . and clothe yourselves with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth (4:1** and **24),** is to fulfill the high calling to which we were called in a completely new life and in a completely new, **Spirit-filled** way.

The matter of submission: Wives should submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22a; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4-5). With an understanding of

submission in mind, it must be noted that this command does not place the wife in an inferior position. All people, regardless of their position in life, are equal in standing before **God** through **Messiah (Galatians 3:28)**. The world may place a greater or lesser value on persons as was true in the first century Roman Empire. In that world (and still in some places today), **wives** were considered as property and also greatly inferior to **their husbands**. **The Rabbi** encourages the **wives** to be in correct biblical submission – not subservient, but as a complement, an equal, to **her husband**.

Wives are always given great social status in Judaism as illustrated in the following rabbinic quote: **Honor your wife, for thereby you enrich yourself. A man should be ever careful about the honor due to his wife, because no blessing is expected in his house except on her account (Tractate Bava Metzia 59a).** It is therefore logical that the B'rit Chadashah affirms **their** distinctive role in marriage. **Women** have many gifts. The mothering instinct not seen in most **men** is something unique to **women**. In a connected theme, **Sha'ul** also encourages the Messianic **wives** to respect **their husbands**. **Men** often look for this in the marriage relationship and **women** should be motivated as **they** realize **they** are actually showing respect to **Messiah** in the process **(5:33)**. But what are **women** to do if **they** are married to an unbeliever?

> **Guidelines for believers married to unbelievers who want to stay married (First Corinthians 7:12-14): Yeshua,** in the course of **His** ministry, had never addressed this issue. But **Paul**, with no less authority did. With two sets of perfectly balanced sentences, **he** says that **believers** are not to initiate **divorce** proceedings: **To the rest I say – I, not the Lord: if any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she is satisfied to go on living with him, he should not leave her. Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband who is satisfied to go on living with her, she is not to leave him (First Corinthians 7:12-13).** Indeed, **Peter** also instructs married **women** that **they should submit to their husbands, so that even if some of them do not believe the Word, they will be won over by your conduct (First Peter 3:1a).** While **Paul** does not reflect on this here, it certainly must have been difficult for **a woman** in **Corinth** to stand out alone in a **marriage** and to accept **Yeshua Messiah** as **her Lord** and **Savior**. In most cases in Greco-Roman society, the religion of **the father** in the family was the religion of the whole household **(Acts 16:33-34)**. Undoubtedly, then, for a **wife** to go against the religion of the household and become **a believer**

must have, in some cases at least, led to intense friction in the home.

Believers married to **unbelievers** were not to worry that **they**, **themselves**, **their marriage**, or **their children** would be defiled by the unbelieving **spouse**. On the contrary, just the opposite is true. **Divorce** was to be avoided because the believing **spouse** was, and is, a channel of **God's** grace in **the marriage**. **For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.** Being **unequally yoked** (see my commentary on **Second Corinthians, to see link click Bi – Do Not Be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**), one flesh with **an unbeliever**, can be frustrating, discouraging, and even costly. But it need not be defiling because one **believer** can sanctify a home. **Sanctified** here refers to *being set apart*. **Sanctification** in this context is matrimonial and familial, not personal or spiritual.

Furthermore, **God** looks on the family as a unit. Even if it is divided spiritually, and most of its members are unbelieving and immoral, the entire family is sanctified by **the believer** among them. Therefore, if an unbelieving **spouse** is willing to stay, **the believer** is not to seek a **divorce**. **Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy (1 Cor 7:14).** Just the presence of one **believer** will protect **the children**. It is not that **their** salvation is assured, but that **they** are protected from undue spiritual harm and that **they** will receive spiritual blessing because **they** share the spiritual benefits of the believing parent. Often the testimony of the believing parent in this situation is effective, because **the children** see a clear contrast to the unbelieving parent's life, and that leads them to salvation.

Guidelines for believers married to unbelievers who want to leave (First Corinthians 7:15-16): Paul now moves to the next step; there is an exception to the rule of no **divorce**. **But if the unbelieving spouse leaves** (Greek: *chorizo*, meaning *separate*)**, let him leave.** In keeping with the whole argument, **Paul** once more qualifies the ideal with an exception. **The believer** may not pursue **divorce**, but if **the pagan** wants to **leave**, let **them** do so. This verse does *not* say, "If the pagan begins **divorce** proceedings." Words mean something, and *chorizo* simply means *to separate,* or *to leave*. If **a wife** had to rely on a vindictive fleeing pagan **husband** to begin **divorce** proceedings, **she** would be left in a state of **slavery**. **Her** only crime was faith in **Messiah**. However, **in circumstances like these, the brother or sister**

> **is not enslaved,** and is able to **divorce** and remarry. **God has called you to a life of peace,** not **slavery (First Corinthians 7:15).**
>
> **Marriage** was not designed for an evangelistic tool. Missionary dating is a bad idea; and missionary **marriages** are bad if **the unbelieving spouse leaves**. Far too many young brides or grooms have been *led away from* **Messiah** as a result of the influence of **the unbelieving spouse**. **For the wife** has no assurance that **she will save her husband**, and **the husband** has no assurance that **he will save his wife (1 Cor 7:16)?** To cling to **a marriage** in which the pagan is determined to end would inevitably lead to frustration and tension. The certain strain is not justified by the uncertain result. The guiding principle must be **peace**.

The manner of submission: The manner or attitude of submission is to be **as they do to the Lord (5:22b).** This does not mean that a wife is to **submit** to **her husband** in the same way **she submits to the Lord**, but rather that **her** submission to **her husband** *is* **her** service **to the Lord**. Everything we do in obedience to **the Lord** should also be done first of all for **His** glory and to please **Him**. A **woman** who properly submits to **her husband** also submits to **the Lord**. This explains why a believer should marry a believer and not become **unequally yoked together** with an unbeliever. Such a home invites civil war from the beginning.

The motive of submission: **For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church (5:23a). Sha'ul** will have more to say about this with regards to the role of the **husband** (see my commentary on **Ephesians Bx – The Role and Priorities of the Husband**), but the overriding principle is stated here. **God's** directions are clear. The **wife** is called upon to place **herself** under the authority and leadership of **her husband**, and the **husband** is to love **his wife** as **Messiah** loved **the Church**. This does not mean that the **husband** should be a dictator or that the **wife** should be a doormat. The **husband** is to lead through sacrifice and love, and the **wife** is to submit with sincerity and respect.

The fact that the **husband** is to serve as the head of the family as a servant leader, exemplifies **Yeshua Himself**. **He** came as a leader by serving others, even to the point of self-sacrificing death on the Roman cross. This is clearly the greatest example **husbands** have and clearly defines the biblical idea of headship in marriage. Hence, **the Rabbi** encourages the **wives** to submit to **their husbands** even as they submit to **Yeshua**.

The model of submission: He Himself being the Savior of the Body (5:23b). The supreme and ultimate model of submission is **Yeshua Messiah Himself**, who performed the supreme act of submission by giving **His** own sinless life to save a sinful world. **Messiah** is **the Savior of the Body, His Church,** for whom **He** died on a Roman cross. **He** is the perfect **Provider**, **Protector**, and **Head** of **His Church**, which is **His Body**. **He** is the divine role model for **husbands**, who should provide for, protect, preserve, love, and lead **their wives** and families in the same way that **Messiah** cares for **His Church**. **Wives** are no more to be co-providers, co-protectors, or co-leaders with **their husbands** than **the Church** is to have such roles with **Yeshua Messiah**. **But just as the Church submits to Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (5:24).** To follow **God's** plan for the family not only is pleasing to **Him**, but is the only way to godlier, happier, and more secure homes. **His** plan is neither for the exaltation of **men** and the suppression of **women**, nor for the exaltation of **women** and the suppression of **men**, but for the perfection and fulfillment of both **men** and **women** as **He** has ordained **them** to be. Such perfection and fulfillment can only be made possible by **the filling** of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** (see my commentary on **Ephesians Bt – Be Filled with the Ruach**).