

## Ephesians 5:21-22, 33b

### Introduction

As Christians who have been loved and redeemed by God, we're to watch carefully how we walk, Paul says in Ephesians chapter five (5:15). We shouldn't walk as unwise people, but as wise, buying up the time, because the days are evil (5:15b-16). We shouldn't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (5:17). The word for "understand" points to a spiritual insight and perception (cf. 1Sam. 2:10 [LXX only]; Ps. 14:2; 28:5; Prov. 2:5, 9). The point isn't just a factual knowledge of what God's will is, but a spiritual perception of the beauty and goodness of His will and a spiritual insight into how I'm to be daily working out this will of God in my life. This means that it's impossible for any unbeliever to understand the Lord's will. Only the Christian who's been born from above can *understand* God's will. This understanding—this spiritual insight and perception—is something that you can't impart to me and I can't impart to you. It's not a formula that can be learned or mastered through teaching and study. It's a gift from God that's developed experientially (subjective) as we seek to conduct ourselves always in a manner that's worthy of the gospel of Christ (objective [this *can* be taught]; cf. Phil. 1:27). The "*moral*" will of God for the daily living of our lives is "revealed" to us always in and through the revelation of His *gracious, saving will* for us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:5, 8-12). Are you unwise and foolish, or are you buying up the time? Are we growing each day in our understanding—experientially—of what the will of the Lord is?

Paul continues in verse 18, writing that instead of getting drunk with wine we should be filled in the Spirit—filled with all the fullness of *God*, in *Christ Jesus*, through the *Spirit* (cf. Eph. 3:19; 4:13). When we're filled in the Spirit, then we'll understand the Father's *gracious saving will* for us in Christ, and this should overflow in praise and thanksgiving (5:19-20).

"Speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual... singing and psalmodizing in your heart to the Lord... giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even to the Father." This is the "*moral*" will of God for us. And then Paul adds to this list of "ing's" (speaking, singing and psalmodizing, and giving thanks) a fourth "ing":

**I. Ephesians 5:21-22**— ...being subject to one another in the fear of Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord...

The first three "ing's" were all related (praise and thanksgiving), but this "ing" (being subject) takes us in a different direction and sets the stage for the next twenty-one verses.

The important thing to see here is that subjecting ourselves to one another—to the God-ordained authorities in our lives (masters, parents, husbands)<sup>1</sup>—is one of the supernatural fruits, and

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of commentators who suggest that here Paul has in mind a mutual or reciprocal subjection. Those who are most consistent recognize that if this is, in fact, the case, then the following section (5:22-6:9) must be interpreted in the light of this mutual subjection in verse 21 (e.g., when husbands love their wives they are subjecting themselves to their wives). Some pastors today ask the groom: "Will you submit to your wife...?" I believe that this interpretation of Paul is untenable.

therefore one of the signs, of being “filled in the Spirit.” It’s one of the ways that we live out experientially our growing understanding of—our spiritual insight into and perception of—God’s

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“[H]ow does mutual submission work? If A submits to B, then B is not submitting but ruling. It could be that A submits with respect to some things or areas to B and, on the other hand, B submits to A in other things or areas. But how does one know when or in what areas you are to submit? Certainly, in the next section (5:22-6:9) there are those who submit (wives, children, slaves) and there are those who do not submit (husbands, fathers, masters)... According to Clark the idea of mutual submission may mean to ‘let there be [subjection] among you’ (i.e., ‘let each of you [subject] himself or herself to the one he or she should be [subject] to’).” ... Mutual [subjection]... would imply that one is willing to [be subject] to those who have authority, whether it be in the home, church, or in society?” (Hoehner).

“The pronoun ‘one another’ is not always fully reciprocal. Although advocates of the mutual submission interpretation assume that the relationships expressed by the Greek pronoun are always symmetrical (and so must mean ‘everyone to everyone’), this depends entirely on the context. On occasion, the pronoun does have a fully reciprocal significance (Eph. 4:25; cf. John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 1:12). But in other contexts a symmetrical relationship cannot be in view. For example, Revelation 6:4, ‘so that men should slay one another’, cannot mean that each killed the other at precisely the same time as he or she was killed. Likewise, Galatians 6:2, ‘Bear one another’s burdens’, does not signify that ‘everyone should exchange burdens with everyone else’, but that ‘some who are more able should help bear the burdens of others who are less able’ (cf. also 1 Cor. 11:33; Luke 2:15; 21:1; 24:32). In the present context, then, given that ‘submit’ is one-directional in its reference to submission to authority, and that the pronoun does not always indicate a symmetrical relationship, it is preferable to understand the clause ‘submitting to one another’ to refer to submission to appropriate authorities, not mutual submission. V. 21, ‘being submissive to one another in the fear of Christ’, is a programmatic statement which introduces the topic of ‘submission’, and this is developed in the household table of 5:22–6:9. The verse is tightly linked with what immediately follows: there is no verb in v. 22, and so ‘submitting’ must be understood from v. 21 for its meaning and sense. The idea of ‘submission’ is unpacked in v. 22 without the verb being repeated. It is as though the apostle is saying: ‘Submit to one another, and what I mean is, wives submit to your husbands, children to your parents, and slaves to your masters’” (O’Brien).

Lincoln (who believes that verse 21 includes the idea of parents being subject to their children, masters being subject to their slaves, and husbands being subject to their wives in the sense of “a readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others”) acknowledges: “Elsewhere the notion of submission is only [emphasis mine] used for the attitude of specific groups—women (1 Cor 14:34; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11; Titus 2:5), children (1 Tim 3:4), and slaves (Titus 2:9)—or for the attitude of believers to the state (Rom 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1).” Lincoln dismisses the view of Clark, Hoehner, and O’Brien (above) not with any evidence, but only by saying: “This does not do enough justice to the force of this verse.” Lincoln does not grapple with the fundamental meaning of the verb “*hypotasso*”; neither does he deal with the fact that after v. 21, this verb is not repeated in v. 22. Unfortunately, he doesn’t deal with any of the evidence adduced by O’Brien.

Lincoln sums up his own view: “Here in Ephesians mutual submission coexists with a hierarchy of roles within the household. Believers should not insist on getting their own way, so there is a general sense in which husbands are to have a submissive attitude to wives, putting their wives’ interests before their own, and similarly parents to children and masters to slaves. But this does not eliminate the more specific roles in which wives are to submit to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters.”

I would suggest that even Lincoln’s (I believe faulty) view should caution us against referencing mutual submission in the context of the marriage charge/vows. Lincoln’s “mutual submission” (a readiness to renounce one’s own will [self-serving desires?] for the sake of others) should be more than sufficiently covered by the groom’s vow to love his wife (in the biblical sense of that word; 1 Cor. 13). In this light, I would suggest that for the husband to vow that he will submit to his wife will necessarily be biblically misleading, especially if there is no reference in the vows to the groom’s and bride’s respective roles of headship and subjection. It sends the message that there is no sense in which the wife is uniquely to be subject to her husband. How we need a work of God in the church to enable us to see and to celebrate unapologetically the goodness and beauty of headship and subjection—of God’s revealed will for our joy and His glory!

gracious, saving will. But what does this subjection have to do with God's gracious, saving will? The answer is found in those simple, and yet wonderfully loaded words: "[Be] subject to one another *in the fear of Christ*."

### **"The fear of the Lord"**

In the Old Testament, there's only *one fear* that's righteous and good and life-giving, and that's the fear of the LORD—the fear of Yahweh.

The fear of Yahweh is first of all a trembling before Him as the one who is the omnipotent Creator and sustainer of the universe and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth (notice all of the different Hebrew words).

- Psalm 2:11 (cf. Ps. 48:6; Isa. 33:14) — Serve Yahweh with **fear [ya-re]** and rejoice with **trembling [r<sup>e</sup>a-dah]**.
- Psalm 119:75, 120 (cf. Job 4:15) — I know, O Yahweh, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me... My **flesh bristles [stands on end; sa-mar]** for **dread [pa-had]** of You, And I **fear [ya-re]** Your judgments.
- Jeremiah 5:21–22 (cf. Ps. 55:4; 96:9; Isa. 13:8; Joel 2:6) — "Now hear this, O people who are simpleminded fools and without a heart of wisdom... Do you not **fear [ya-re]** Me?" declares Yahweh. "Do you not **tremble [hyl]** in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual statute, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it."
- Ezra 9:4 (cf. 10:3; Judg. 7:3) — Then everyone who **trembled [ha-red]** at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me...
- Psalm 99:1 (cf. Exod. 15:14; Deut. 2:25; Isa. 64:2) — Yahweh reigns, let the peoples **tremble [ra-gaz]**; He sits enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth quake!
- Jeremiah 2:19 (cf. Exod. 15:16; Deut. 2:25; 28:66) — "Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake Yahweh your God, and the **dread [pa-had]** of Me is not in you," declares Lord Yahweh of hosts.
- Philippians 2:12 (cf. Mk. 16:8; Acts 7:32; 16:29) — So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed... work out your salvation with **fear [phobos]** and **trembling [tromos]**...
- 1 Peter 1:17 — If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in **fear [phobos]** during the time of your sojourn...

The fear of Yahweh is first of all a trembling before Him as the one who is the Creator and sustainer of the universe, and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth. But it's more than this. The fear of Yahweh is a trembling before Him such that it causes us, as the sinful creatures that we are, to cling to His promises and to obey His commands.

- Isaiah 66:2 (cf. 66:5) — "**To this one I will look**, to him who is **humble and contrite of spirit**, and who **trembles [ha-red]** at My word."
- Psalm 115:11 (cf. 40:3; Prov. 14:27; 16:6) — You who **fear [ya-re]** Yahweh, **trust** in Yahweh; He is their **help** and their **shield**.
- Isaiah 8:13–14 (cf. Gen. 9:2 / Deut. 1:29) — "It is Yahweh of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your **fear [mo-ra]**, and He shall be your **cause of trembling/dread [a-ras]**. **Then He shall become a sanctuary...**"

- Deuteronomy 5:29 — Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would **fear [ya-re]** Me and **keep all My commandments** all the days, **that it may be well with them** and with their sons forever!
- 2 Corinthians 7:1 — Therefore, having these **promises**, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting **holiness** in the **fear [phobos]** of God.

The fear of Yahweh is a trembling before Him as the one who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth such that it causes us, as the sinful creatures that we are, to cling to His promises and to obey His commands.

Since we struggle with the word “fear” (given the negative connotation of something servile and slavish), there are many who would speak instead of “reverence” for God. “Fearing God... refers to an awe or reverence toward God. To ‘fear Yahweh’ means to serve and be faithful to him” (Lexham Theological Wordbook). Can you see the problem here? This definition actually empties this foundational biblical concept of its true power. “Reverence” (“a feeling of [deep] respect or admiration for someone or something”; “a feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe”) fails to convey the sense of a trembling before God as the omnipotent Creator of the universe and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth. Many of those who would substitute “reverence” for “fear” are concerned that “fear” will communicate something unbiblical (something servile and slavish). But I wonder how often there’s also just an underlying failure (on all of our parts) to truly grasp who God is and therefore the fear that is due Him (Jer. 10:6-7). Will the one who has truly learned to tremble before Yahweh hesitate to speak of the fear of Yahweh?

But what about the concern of communicating the idea of being “terrorized” by God so that we can only think of fleeing from Him, or being “afraid” of God so that we never feel secure in His love? The answer to this concern is simple and wonderful. We must see how the word “fear” is invested with a unique and fuller meaning by virtue of who it is that is feared, and so also by virtue of the presence of faith. This isn’t just the fear of God who is the omnipotent Creator of the universe and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth. This is also the fear of God whose name is *Yahweh*, who is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, who is merciful and gracious and forgiving, and therefore the one in whom we have trusted. The psalmist writes:

- Psalm 130:3–4 — If You should keep iniquities, O Yah, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is **forgiveness**, that You may be **feared [ya-re]**.
- Psalm 31:19 — How great is Your **goodness**, which You have stored up for those who fear **[ya-re]** You, which You have worked for those who **take refuge** in You...!
- Psalm 33:18 — Behold, the eye of Yahweh is on those who **fear [ya-re]** Him, on those who **wait** for His **lovingkindness**.

The fear of the Lord is that which causes us daily to flee *to Him* and find in Him our *only refuge*. And, in turn, finding in the Lord our *only refuge* is that which causes us all the more to fear and tremble before (only) Him—so that we flee to Him.

The Hebrew and Greek speaking Jews had the same “problem” we have. All their words for fear and dread and trembling can (and very often did) refer to a servile and slavish fear.<sup>2</sup> Their words for fear and dread and trembling didn’t mean something different than our English words for fear and dread and trembling. Therefore, rather than explaining that the “fear” of God “actually means” a reverential awe for God, we ought to be emphasizing *who* it is that we fear and tremble before: The God who is the omnipotent Creator of the universe and the righteous Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth (so that we fear Him supremely) *and* who has savingly and mercifully revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ (so that we flee to Him joyfully). When we do this, then not only will the “fear of God” make perfect sense, but it will also be invested with redemptive and life-giving meaning. The love of God apart from the fear of God and a trembling before him is an insipid love. It cannot be the true, biblical love of God. The fear of God apart from the love of God and a delight in His promises and commands is an insipid fear; it cannot be the true, biblical “fear of God.”

As finite, mortal creatures, we could say that “fear” is something innate to us. We will always fear someone or something. But the beauty of the fear of Yahweh is that this supreme fear is the antidote to all other fears.

- Isaiah 2:20–22 — In that day men will... go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the **dread** [*pa-had*] of Yahweh and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth **tremble** [*a-ras*]. Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed?
- Isaiah 51:12 (cf. Prov. 29:25; 51:7) — “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should **fear** [*ya-re*] man who dies and the son of man who is made like grass...?”
- Luke 12:4–5 — “But I say to you, My friends, do not fear [*phobeo*] those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! [In this way you will be saved, and also be delivered from all other fears!]”

The constant emphasis in Scripture is that fear is owed to God and to God alone. The fear of God is the key to living in true subjection to Him. So it’s significant, in light of all the above, that Paul writes here in Ephesians:

**II. Ephesians 5:21–22** — “[Be] **subject** to one another in the **fear** of Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord...

We might have expected, “be subject to God in the fear of Him”; “fear the Lord and be subject to Him (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:17). But what does Paul say? “[Be] **subject** to one another in the **fear** of Christ.”

How can another human being (even a parent or a husband) have authority over me—who am also a human being? Isn’t this ultimately just an illegitimate form of slavery? How can Paul say that I am to be subject to any human authority? The answer is that all true human authority is derived from and granted by God, as the manifestation of His own authority. The point here is

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<sup>2</sup> See cross references above (The fear of Yahweh B. 1-7) and also: Gen. 3:10; Judg. 6:27; 1 Sam. 17:11, 24; Jer. 26:21; Mat. 25:24-25; Jn. 9:22; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 4:18

not a moral likeness—that the way humans exercise their derived authority mirrors the way God exercises His ultimate authority. That would invalidate all human authority since no human authority (apart from Christ) has ever mirrored perfectly the exercise of God’s authority. Again, the point here is not a moral likeness, such that human authorities can only expect obedience to divine laws. That would also effectively invalidate all human authority. The point here is that the mere presence of authority, in and of itself (even the authority of a sinful husband or father or master) is a manifestation of the reality of that ultimate authority of God—from which all human authority derives. If this wasn’t the case, then every human authority (no matter how well-intentioned) could only be usurping the authority of God. But since this *is* the case—since every human authority, regardless of how well-intentioned it may *or may not* be, is by definition a derivative manifestation of that ultimate authority of God—therefore Paul can say: “[Be] *subject* to one another *in the fear of Christ*.” The point here isn’t just that if we fear Christ then we’ll obey all of His commands, and one of His commands is that we be subject to human authorities.<sup>3</sup> Paul’s point is that subjection to the derived authority of other human beings is uniquely and necessarily the way that we acknowledge the ultimate authority of God (cf. Mat. 28:18; Jn. 5:21-30). We are to see the human authorities in our lives representing in their own persons the authority of God, so that our subjection to these human authorities is uniquely and necessarily the expression of that fear and trembling that we owe to God Himself.<sup>4</sup> This is why Paul can go on to say: “Wives [be subject] to your own husbands *as to the Lord*”—not because your husbands are as perfect or as loving as the Lord but because of the simple fact of their headship and authority which, itself, derives from the headship and the authority of Christ.

Notice how in the following three verses the one that we fear isn’t explicitly identified (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-2).

- 2 Corinthians 7:15 (cf. 7:11) — [Titus’] affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the *obedience* of you all, how you **received him with fear and trembling**.

The picture here seems to be of a fear and trembling **before Titus** (they “received him with fear and trembling) *as one representing in his own person the authority of God*.

- Ephesians 6:5 — Slaves, be *obedient* to those who are your masters according to the flesh, **with fear and trembling**, in the integrity of your heart, as to Christ.

Again, the picture seems to be of a fear and trembling **before masters** (“be obedient to those who are your masters... with fear and trembling”) *as those representing in their own persons the authority of Christ*.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (NRSV, ESV, NIV, NET, NLT, LEB). This fails to explain the reality of human authority and it also fails to explain Paul’s appeal to the “*fear (phobos)* of Christ.”

<sup>4</sup> “God not only wills to be served in His majesty, but when we obey the persons who rule over us[;] in sum, He wills to prove our obedience at this point. And thus, inasmuch as fathers and mothers, magistrates, and all those who have authority, are lieutenants [‘a deputy or substitute acting for a superior’ (OED); ‘a person holding another person’s place or a person acting in place of another’ (MW)] of God and represent His person, it is certain that if one show them contempt and reject them, that it is like declaring that one does not want to obey God at all” (Calvin; quoted in “The Piety of John Calvin”).

- 1 Peter 2:18 — Servants, be *subject* to your masters **with all fear**,<sup>5</sup> not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are unreasonable.

Here, again, the picture seems to be of a fear **before one's master** (“be subject to your masters with all fear”) *as someone representing in his own person the authority of God*.

Would it be going too far, then, to say that slaves are to fear their masters, that children are to fear their parents, and that wives are to fear their husbands? Paul writes in Romans chapter 13:

- Romans 13:7 — Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; **fear to whom fear**<sup>6</sup>; honor to whom honor.

I have discovered only four places in the Bible where the fear of another human being is acknowledged and even commanded as a good thing. This is precisely what makes Paul's use of this language here so powerfully provocative. And this is precisely why the translation of the ESV and NIV is so inadequate, and even misleading: “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue..., *respect to whom respect*..., honor to whom honor...” The simple fact of the matter is that “respect” is not a faithful translation of the Greek word for “fear.” The immediate context of verse 7 (as well as the larger context of vv. 1-7) tells us that this fear is due specifically to those in authority over us. We see the same thing in Joshua chapter three.

- Joshua 3:7; 4:14 — Yahweh said to Joshua, “This day [when the waters of the Jordan are cut off] I will begin to *magnify* you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as *I* have been with Moses, *I* will be with you” ... On that day, Yahweh *magnified* Joshua in the sight of all Israel, so that they **feared him [ya-re]**, just as they had **feared Moses** all the days of his life.<sup>7</sup>

What are we to make of the versions which translate, “They *respected* him just as they had *respected* Moses?” Can we see from the context how far short this falls? The people feared Moses and Joshua as divinely ordained authorities who represented in their own persons—as those appointed by God—the authority of God. We read in Leviticus chapter nineteen:

- Leviticus 19:3 — “Every one of you shall **fear [ya-re; LXX, *phobeo*] his mother and his father**<sup>8</sup> ... I am Yahweh your God.”

Here again, we see that the fear of one's parents is “shorthand” for the fear of God *because* it's the ultimate authority of God that's represented in the authority of one's parents. Finally, we read in verse 33 of Ephesians chapter five:

**III. Ephesians 5:33** — ...the wife must see to it that she **fears [*phobeo*] her husband**.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Contra “with all respect”; ESV, NASB, NRSV, NLT

<sup>6</sup> Cf. LSB, NASB, ASV, KJV, NKJV; contra: ESV, NIV, NRSV, HCSB, NET, NLT, LEB

<sup>7</sup> Cf. LSB, NASB, HCSB, ASV, KJV, NKJV, NLT; contra: NET, LEB; “stood in awe” (ESV, NIV, NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. LSB, NASB, ESV, NRSV, ASV, KJV, NKJV, LEB; contra: NIV, HCSB, NET, NLT

<sup>9</sup> Cf. ASV; KJV; LSB marg., NASB marg., LEB marg.; contra: LSB; NASB; ESV; NIV; NRSV; HCSB; NET; NLT; NKJV; LEB

Paul could have said, “the wife must see to it that she honors [*timao*] her husband” (Mat. 15:4; Jn. 5:23; LXX: Exod. 20:12; 2 Sam. 23:19, 23; Ps. 22:23; Prov. 3:9; Isa. 29:13), or, “the wife must see to it that she shows deference to [*entrepo*] her husband” (Mat. 21:37; Lk. 18:2; Heb. 12:9). Instead, he says quite boldly and unapologetically: “the wife must see to it that she fears her husband.” This is no servile or slavish fear (cf. 1 Pet. 3:5-6; 1 Jn. 4:18)! Paul is linking us back to verse 21 where he said that we are to be “subject to one another *in the fear of Christ*.” The wife’s fear of her husband is “shorthand” for her fear of God, not because of any superior qualities in her husband, but because it’s the ultimate authority of God that’s represented in the authority of her husband.

What are we to make of the fact that almost all English versions translate, “the wife must see to it that she *respects* [rather than ‘fears’] her husband”? This translation focuses all the attention horizontally on the husband exclusively rather than vertically on God *via* the husband (“respect” is a wholly inadequate word to describe the attitude of a finite creature toward the infinite Creator God). And so this translation, in the attempt to make the wife’s subjection to her husband more “palatable” and less “offensive,” actually empties the wife’s subjection to her husband of all its true freedom and power and beauty. When a wife can *understand* what it means to fear her husband, then she will be freed and empowered to be subject to her husband—yes, and to show him respect and honor and deference even when he himself is “unworthy.”

## **Conclusion**

A wife’s fearing her husband has nothing to do with a husband’s “power” to intimidate or to force subjection. This isn’t the nature of the husband’s authority (we’ll come back to this later). It’s not the husband who must see to it that his wife is in subjection to him or that she fears him—or God! This is the responsibility and calling only of the wife. She subjects *herself* to her husband *in the fear of Christ... as to the Lord*. She subjects *herself* to her husband as one in whom she sees *represented* the *authority* of her own Redeemer and Savior and covenant Lord.

Husbands, how can this calling of our wives not give a more urgent and pressing meaning to the first half of verse 33: “...each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself”? Are you living as a husband in the light of your wife’s calling to fear you? In our flesh, we wish with all our hearts that our wives had no such calling, and so we ignore it and even subtly encourage our wives to ignore it themselves. We much prefer an equal partnership—a 50/50 (romantic) friendship where authority is just a necessary evil held in reserve for those times when a decision must be made, and agreement has been impossible to achieve (if even that). This is the result of our own spiritual laziness and disobedience. And yet, wives, we’ve seen this morning how even when a husband is being lazy and disobedient, you can still live in full subjection to your husband in the fear of Christ. Anything else is disobedience to God Himself.

We saw at the beginning that subjecting ourselves to one another—to the God-ordained authorities in our lives (masters, parents, husbands)—is one of the supernatural fruits, and therefore one of the signs, of our being “filled in the Spirit.” It’s one of the ways that we live out experientially our growing understanding of—our spiritual insight into and perception of—God’s



gracious, saving will. And what does this subjection have to do with God's gracious, saving will? The answer is to be found in these simple, and yet wonderfully loaded words: "[Be] subject to one another *in the fear of Christ*, wives to your own husbands *as to the Lord*... the wife must see to it that she *fears her husband*."