

**Trading the Double Bind for the Double Bond:  
Overlooked Grammatical Details Shed New Light on  
“Wives are Subject to Their Own Husbands in Everything” Ephesians 5:24**

by Charis Hart

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I am inspired by Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946) to question teachings that drag me down rather than lifting me heavenward.

“Better, far better, that we should doubt every translator of the Bible than to doubt the inspiration of St. Paul’s utterances about women; and the justice of God towards women: or, above all, to doubt that “Christ hath redeemed us” (women) ‘from the curse of the law’ (Galatians 3:13).”  
([Katharine Bushnell](#))

### **TROUBLES IN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE PARADISE**

Evangelical Christians do a lot of hand wringing over the state of marriage and the high divorce rate in our midst. Why are our marriages failing in epidemic proportions? I propose that the high death rate of marriages among evangelical Christians is directly related to erroneous theology regarding a wife’s submission and how a Biblical Christ-honoring marriage should work. Boiled down to a simple formula: **Destructive theology about marriage→ Death of Christian marriages.**

Contrast the teaching of prominent Christian writer, speaker, pastor, and author Dr. John Piper with the laboratory findings of marriage researcher Dr. John Gottman. Piper writes:

"it is simply impossible that from time to time a woman not be put in a position of influencing or guiding men . . . . The closer they get to the personal side, the more inappropriate it becomes for women to exert directive influence. . . . To the degree that a woman's influence over man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man's good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God's created order."  
(Piper 60,62)

While Piper advocates against female influence which he equates with “leadership”, marriage researcher, John Gottman has found that the unwillingness of a husband to receive the

influence of his wife to be a strong predictor of divorce.<sup>1</sup> Gottman's research is the centerpiece of a *Newsweek* report on "The Science of a Good Marriage":

An unequal balance of power is also deadly to a marriage. Gottman found that a husband who doesn't share power with his wife has a much higher risk of damaging the relationship. Why are men singled out? Gottman says his data show that most wives, even those in unstable marriages, are likely to accept their husband's influence. It's the men who need to shape up, he says. The changes can be simple, like turning off the football game when she needs to talk. Gottman says the gesture proves he values "us" over "me." (Wingert)

The inclination observed by Gottman of "most wives. . . **to accept their husband's influence**" sounds a lot like what Christians would think of as "wifely **submission**"! In the same article Gottman also shares his findings that anger is not the most destructive emotion in a marriage, the quality of the spousal friendship is the most important factor in marital satisfaction, and couples build a "sound marital house" by working together and appreciating the best in each other.

**But, that is not what I learned about marriage in church!**

Since I converted from cradle Catholicism to Evangelical Protestantism in 1979 at the age of 19, I have been thoroughly indoctrinated in church and from various Christian resources that "wives are **commanded** to submit". A quick Google search of that exact phrase yielded 2,700 results. In a representative quote from Dr. Bruce Ware, Professor of Christian Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary<sup>2</sup>, Ware curiously refers repeatedly to the biblical references to wifely submission in terms of "command" (3X), "admonition" (2X), "imperative" (2X), "told" (2X), "directed" (1X), and "requires" (1X). However, my research on the Greek grammar used by the Biblical writers points in a far different direction: a direction which lines up

more with Gottman's laboratory findings than with preaching like Ware's.

The basic Greek verb translated "submit" is transliterated *hupotasso*. There is a single unambiguous instance<sup>3</sup> in the entire Bible of "wives submit" using an imperative verb form (i.e. a command): Colossians 3:18 "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

However, please note this command has a qualifier . The wife is charged with the responsibility to use her own conscience and her own relationship with the Lord as her guide and test everything her husband asks of her against the standard of whether it is "fitting in the Lord".

A close look at the Greek grammar of the *hupotasso* verb in every other biblical instance speaking expressly of wifely submission- Ephesians 5:24 as well as Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:1 and 5- reveals that in each of these cases the *hupotasso* verb is in a form which the Greek-English interlinear Bible (at <http://interlinearbible.org/> and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org)) parses in the passive voice.<sup>4</sup>

The Passive Voice, by definition, means that an outside agent is performing the action upon the subject. (Wallace) The subject is not producing the action but receiving it. "No volition – nor even necessarily awareness of the action – is implied on the part of the subject". The agent can be named or implied (as in the case of so called "divine agency"). (ntgreek.org)

### **EVANGELICAL WIVES IN A DOUBLE BIND**

One of the most oft quoted verses on wifely submission sets a bar so high that no woman has or will ever reach this standard- if understood in Ware's terms of "command", "admonition", "imperative", "requires".

"but even as the assembly is subject to Christ,  
so also [are] the wives to their own husbands in everything." Eph 5:24

“**In everything**” leaves no room for any hint of lack of subjection in any arena at any time. There is NO exception clause (such as we saw in Colossians 3:18 where the command was moderated by the litmus test of “as is fitting in the Lord”). In 1998 the Southern Baptists amended their official statement of beliefs adding the requirement that a wife must “submit herself graciously” to her husband’s leadership:

"A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God, as is her husband, and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation."(PBS: The News Hour)

Professor Sarah Sumner notes: “Unfortunately it omits several important aspects of Ephesians 5. To begin with, it does not say that the wife is to submit to her husband “in everything”. Most Southern Baptists greatly limit her submission to times of decision making.” (Sumner 163, footnote).

So, the very theologically conservative traditional complementarian Southern Baptists have constructed a “Biblical Marriage Catch 22” for the wife. She is in a double bind<sup>5</sup> as is anyone who understands this verse as prescribing a wifely **behavior**.

If she goes with limiting her submission to decision making occasions, she violates the “in everything” clause. If she goes with “in everything” she is not free to ever go against her husband’s will under any circumstances. Complementarians will often state an exception to the rule: “The only exception to this submission is when you are asked to submit to something in direct violation of God’s Word (Acts 5:29)”<sup>6</sup> (Dorothy Patterson). However, this leaves wide open what her husband can demand of her so long as she is unable to pinpoint a specific proof text in God’s Word to ease her conscience about violating her presumed obligation to obey him.

According to John Piper she can say “no” to group sex saying **with** a submissive soft pleading demeanor.:

Honey, I want so much to follow you as my leader. God calls me to do that, and I would love to do that. It would be sweet to me if I could enjoy your leadership. But if you ask me to do this, require this of me, then I can't go there. . . . (Piper)

Observe Piper role modeling what he expects from such a wife in minute [2:00-2:30](#) of the YouTube video “John Piper: Does a women submit to abuse?”(sic)

And if her husband is verbally abusive and smacks her Piper advises:

If it's not requiring her to sin but simply hurting her, then I think she endures verbal abuse for a season, and she endures perhaps being smacked one night, and then she seeks help from the church." (Piper)

Marriage researcher, Gottman, gives quite the opposite counsel in his chapter entitled “Embrace Her Anger”of the book “What Predicts Divorce?” [emphasis added]:

“I suggest the bottom line.. was that, for most marriages, the best advice one can give husbands who want to preserve their marriages is ‘Embrace her anger,’ and **the best advice one can give wives is not to be overly compliant**, but to persist in getting her husband to face areas of continuing disagreement” ([Gottman](#) 130)

Do those at the other end of the evangelical spectrum- self professed theologically conservative **egalitarian** Christians- understand wifely submission passages in a way which provides any relief to wives? I found two approaches among egalitarians. One egalitarian approach reads Paul as speaking into his own culture with its status quo of subjugated wives, children, and slaves. ([Francisco](#)). My objection to this is the appearance of injustice on God's part toward those wives, children, slaves of old. How would the gospel be “GOOD news” for

them if Paul was telling those wives that God **endorses** their subjugation? If God was in favor of it then, when did He change His mind and why? My research and understanding of Scripture rests upon the premises that God is **good**, that the Gospel is **good** news not just for moderns but for ancients, and that the omniscient God knew that society would (and will continue to) change. All of humanity- past, present, and future- were in His sights as He inspired Paul's writing. His extraordinary Word is not dead letters from a bygone era but "living and active" (Heb. 4:12 NASB), as true and freeing for me today as it was for Paul's contemporaries.

Another egalitarian approach attempts to soften the obedience implications which complementarians embrace as inherent to wifely submission. Many egalitarians interpret *hupotasso* with a middle voice and emphasize the **voluntary** nature of a wife's submission. The wife **voluntarily** comes under, supports, yields to her husband in "self instigated" submission ([Preato](#)). Many evangelical- both egalitarian and complementarian- have made the judgment call toward understanding the wife submit/*hupotasso* verbs in their middle voice sense, where "submit" is assumed to be "voluntary" and "self-instigated". As a Greek novice going strictly by the lexicon parsing (which- in my opinion- providentially tilts to "passive" in these instances), I discovered this interpretational trend through reading and communicating with some more accomplished Greek scholars. (McCarthy, Aubrey). Suzanne McCarthy referred me to Greek Classics Professor Carl Conrad who advocates for verbs -such as these *hupotasso* verbs I am considering- to be considered middles unless it is clear from the presence of an explicit instrument or agent that the sense is passive. Before investing more time in this research and writing project, I wanted to ascertain that the acknowledged ambivalence of Koine Greek passive/middle verbs may impact interpretation of this passage (Conrad) . I e-mailed the most

gracious Professor Conrad who acknowledged:

Eph. 5:24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

I really see no satisfactory reason for understanding ὑποτάσσεται as a passive. Could it conceivably be a passive? Well, yes, if we could conceivably envision in this clause an implicit ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ. But I think that the burden of proof rests upon those who want to see it as passive to demonstrate WHY it should be understood as passive. I don't see anything in the text itself that points toward that interpretation. (Conrad)

I am not prepared to come down firmly on the side of divine agency (as ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ would suggest). Nor do I think the words indicate the woman's agency (as in self initiated voluntary yielding up to her husband in everything). To grasp the meaning of the verse, I asked the Lord "HOW is the church subject to You? The passage says it's the same way that a wife subject to her husband." That is a deep philosophical meditation for another paper, but briefly, the answer I received is that being "SUBJECT TO HIM [Christ] in EVERYTHING" is not about a hierarchal institution, demandingness, obedience, duty, performance, and punishment but about connection, love, relationship, safety, and freedom and yes, even a kind of "control" but a "control" which is "GOOD news"! A control which is organic in nature, tender, gracious, liberating, uplifting, and joyful with no resemblance whatsoever to an authoritarian power grab. For a Christian wife, being "subject to her husband in everything" may or may not resemble her experience being "subject to Christ in everything" depending on how much her husband reflects Christlikeness in the manner in which he treats her (which is the thrust of Paul's teaching directed to husbands in this context).

The words of Ephesians 5:24 need to be read and understood in the context of Paul's teaching here and elsewhere. The words are like the trees of a forest and while not neglecting the

individual trees, we also need to keep the whole forest in view to understand Paul and God's point. The context of Ephesians 5 speaks of a HEAD and a BODY which metaphor is a remarkable fit with a passive voice understanding of "is subject" in Ephesians 5:24. The body "is subject" to the head, but there is no volition involved on the part of the body, nor is there agency involved on the part of the head. It is a description of a state of being, not a command for a certain behavior. Thus the head/body metaphor is a perfect illustration and object lesson of connectedness and "being subject" in the passive voice.

In Ephesians 5, Paul's first use of *hypotasso* occurs in the form of a participle in Ephesians 5:21. All of the bolded in the passage below are participles:

Eph 5:18-24

be [ye] filled with the Spirit; (18)

**Speaking** to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and **making melody** in your heart to the Lord; (19)

**Giving thanks** always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; (20)

**Being subject** to one to another in the fear of Christ. (21)

Wives to own husbands as to the Lord. (22)

For husband is head of wife as Christ head of church, Himself Savior of the body (23)

Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives to husbands in everything (24)

In verses 18-21, Paul is describing what it looks like to "be FILLED with the Spirit". Paul is not singling out wives for instruction in submission. Verse 22 does not even have a verb in the

Greek.<sup>4</sup> The verb is carried from verse 21 above. The teaching is directed to “ye”. And “ye” is anyone- male or female- who desires to “BE FILLED with the Spirit”.

Furthermore, the voice of the participle switches from the active voice for “speaking”, “singing”, “making melody”, and “giving thanks” to the passive voice for “being subject”.

Although I have often heard discourse upon Ephesians 5:21 in isolation, sound hermeneutics demands consideration of the immediate context, Paul’s other writings, and the wider context of the Bible. For example, Ephesians 5:26 clarifies that Christ’s ministry to the church is so that “he might present it to himself glorious” where the Greek for “present” means “Beside Standing” (Francisco). This harkens back to Ephesians 2:6 which speaks of the church seated beside Christ in heavenly places. In other words, reflecting Christ, a husband would lift his wife to a place beside himself, a place of equality in the relationship, a place of shared dominion harkening back to the Genesis 1:26-28 mandate and the Garden of Eden.

Contextually, Ephesians 5:24 is a continuation of the thought started in Ephesians 5:21 and clarifies the nature and extent of the *hypotasso* Paul has in mind. Furthermore, Paul’s two uses of *hypotasso* in this context (21 and 24) are a sandwich around his introduction of the head/body metaphor (23). This head/body metaphor is key to understanding Paul’s intent. In the immediate context of Ephesians 5, Paul maps the husband to the head and the wife to the body and refers to the couple thus organically connected as “one flesh”. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul maps the church to a body and speaks of the interdependence of the members of that body.

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” . . . And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (1 Cor 12: 20-21, 26-27 NKJV)

Though the Greek word *hupotasso* is not used in the above passage from 1 Cor. 12, the concept of the organic connection between members of one body IS used. So the above passage is an excellent illustration of what Paul means when he refers to members of the body of Christ “being in subjection” to one another. They are in subjection to one another like the members of a human body are in subjection to one another. If part of me is in a hurting or weakened condition, then other parts of my body are affected. Imagine the effect of a toothache or a lame leg.

So, what is the **fear** about here “Being subject to one another **in fear of Christ**” (Eph 5:21) ? Knowing that my choices impact other members of the body who **are subject** to me by virtue of our organic unity elicits “fear”/concern . Do I use my power as a member of the body of Christ to be a healing force or do I injure, paralyze, perhaps even spread a kind of death to other members by my wayward activities (Acts 5:1-11)? There is no presumed license in Ephesians 5:21 to take turns exercising authority over each other; in fact to “exercise authority over” others is expressly prohibited by Christ.<sup>7</sup>

To my ear, there is no wiggle room to take the submission described in Ephesians 5:24 as “voluntary”. Paul’s description of the quality and extent of a wife’s submission as being “in **EVERYTHING**” removes “voluntary” as valid descriptor. If she is responsible for a middle voice *hupotasso*- self instigated yielding, deferring, coming under, and supporting in **EVERYTHING**- that means whatever her husband wants, he gets. And that is how wifely submission is widely taught and understood. The answer to the question of what wifely submission looks like is featured in an article entitled “Practical Submission” on Focus on the Family’s *Boundless* webzine. The article quotes a reader inquiry:

Does it [wifely submission] mean that after careful research and serious consultation with his wife, a husband has the final say on:

- \* How many kids to have? What type of contraception to use – NFP or artificial contraception? How the kids should be schooled – at home, public or parochial? Whether the wife should be stay-at-home mom or work outside the home?

- \* Where to live geographically? Whether or not to be a homeowner? Whether to move for a job?

- \* What church to go to?

- \* Whether or not to invest money, in say, a 401k or college savings plan?

- \* What about a gut-wrenching, horrible issue – like, a kid gets diagnosed with life-threatening cancer, and the parents strongly differ on whether they should treat it aggressively, or go with hospice care? After talking about it and doing the research, does the husband still have the final say? (Watters)

The answer Focus on the Family's Candice Watters provides is (in part):

In a word, the answer I'd give to your question is **yes**. In some of your scenarios, of course – moving, choosing a church, investing – that answer is easier to accept than in others (Watters)

Think about the extent of the power handed to the husband in the marriage relationship described. His will can prevail regardless of how the wife feels about it and regardless of the consequences upon her and the children. He need merely take his stand upon his presumed rulership over the marriage and the family. He need merely remind her of her duty to obey God's COMMAND in Ephesians 5:24 that she “submit to him in **EVERYTHING**”! Unless she is married to an extraordinarily unselfish and compassionate man, a wife who practices what Ms. Watters is preaching can become the virtual prisoner of her husband's will. (And evangelicals wonder why the divorce rate is so high in their midst!)

Is this widely held marriage paradigm really what Paul and God intended?

## REMOVING THE DOUBLE BIND PLACED UPON WIVES

Ephesians 5:24 is not prescribing a wifely **behavior!** Paul is describing the condition or state of a wife in relation to her husband.

The *hupotasso* verb in Ephesians 5:24 is not in the imperative. Adding such words as “command”, “imperative”, “required”, and “must” perpetrates error. Bible translations which insert an imperative force by adding such words as “should” (NIV, NLT); “ought to be” (NASB); “must be” (ISV) have added to the God breathed original autographs and in so doing have done a grave disservice to Christian marriages. Two older translations preserve the passive sense of the *hupotasso* verb:

“But even as the assembly is subjected to the Christ, so also wives to their own husbands in everything. (Eph 5:24, Darby)  
 “but even as the assembly is subject to Christ, so also are the wives to their own husbands in everything.” (Eph 5:24, Young’s Literal Translation).

And, while many evangelicals assume and teach a middle voice understanding, the decision to assume the **passive** voice is a valid interpretational choice which removes the double bind from Christian wives. Among the definitions of the passive *hupotasso* in Bauer et al (BDAG) are “become subject to a person or a state of being”; “be subjected or subordinated”. Moulton’s definitions for *hupotasso* include “to bring under influence”, “to be brought under a state or influence”(419). The passive voice, indicates the subject is not performing the action but receiving the action. Another grammatical clue is the indicative mood of the verb. “The indicative mood is the only mood conceived of as actual while with the other three moods (imperative, subjunctive, and optative) the action is only thought of as possible or potential. . . The indicative mood is a statement of fact or an actual occurrence from the writer’s or speaker’s

perspective... It may be action occurring in past, present, or future time.” (ntgreek.org)

Taking these subtle grammatical clues at face value, I propose that Paul is stating the **fact** that wives ARE SUBJECT to their husbands at all times with no exceptions.

What can this possibly mean?

It’s not something she does, rather a state of being. It’s a description not a prescription, much like I might say “you **are subject** to gravity”. It harks back to the words God spoke to Eve in Genesis 3:16 when He said “Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you”. Biblical lexicographers J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida define *hupotasso* as, “to bring something under the firm control of someone” (598). As a consequence of her partaking of the forbidden fruit, God said to the woman “your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you”. Whether “the head” controls the body in “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph 5:23) is debated. Egalitarians claim that “the head” would not have been understood as representing “decision making authority over” by ancient Greeks who considered the heart to be the seat of intelligence (Kroeger). CBMW writers attribute control to “the head”.<sup>8</sup> I submit that either way, according to the text, “The husband **is** the head of the wife”, This is not something the wife grants him by behaving a certain way. It is an inescapable state of being for the husband., just like the wife “is subject” to the husband is an inescapable state of being for the wife.

A wife IS SUBJECT to her husband at all times with no exceptions. This is not something she chooses nor has any control over. Her husband simply has a great deal of power/influence over her: for better or worse. To repeat marriage researcher Dr. Gottman’s laboratory observation, “most wives, even those in unstable marriages, are likely **to accept their husband's influence**”.

Although the Genesis 3 consequences of partaking the forbidden fruit are often referred to as “the curse”, God never refers to them in those terms. I believe we would be better served to understand them not as a “curse” upon humankind, but as consequences with great redemptive value; consequences which can ultimately serve to draw people back into relationship, back into the “Garden of Intimacy” with God.

As the woman’s feminine anatomy makes her uniquely vulnerable physically in ways not shared by males, likewise a wife has a unique emotional vulnerability to her husband. I think the following proverb from the popular Christian movie “Fireproof” describes the manner in which all wives ARE SUBJECT to their husbands:

“A woman’s like a rose.  
If you treat her right, she’ll bloom.  
If you don’t, she’ll wilt.”  
-Firefighter Michael in “Fireproof”

In Ephesians 5, Paul repeatedly addresses husbands using imperative verbs for love i.e. unlike the *hypotasso*/submit verb in this context, the *agape*/love verb directed to husbands is a **command** to love his wife. He is also told to nourish and cherish her (with active indicative verb forms).

So Paul states the **fact** that “she **is subject**” to him, then goes on to stress his responsibility toward her to love, nourish, cherish. A body without food and water will die. Likewise, a wife without nourishing and cherishing will wilt and the marriage is at risk of dying.

### **THE DOUBLE BOND!**

In the context of the Ephesians 5 marriage treatise, Paul repeats a phrase directed exclusively to husbands (never to wives) and instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world:

“**leave and cleave**”. This direction occurs 4 times in the Bible: in Genesis 2:24 just following the

formation of the woman, twice repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7, and by Paul in Ephesians 5:31. Interestingly, the Greek verb for “cleave”- *proskollaó*- used by Paul in Ephesians 5, similar to the *hupotasso* verb, is parsed by the Greek-English interlinear in the passive voice which can indicate that it is not something under the husband’s control. Perhaps it is appropriate to consider it a bonding work of God as in “what God **has joined** together. . . .”?

Furthermore, looking through the definitions for *hupotasso* (subject to) in the Perseus database, I found “post in the shelter of” and “append” which appear to me to correspond well with the definitions found for *proskollaó* (cleave) “glue on” or “to be stuck to, stick or cleave to”. Believing every word of the Bible in its original autographs to be God breathed down to the smallest detail, I don’t think this is accidental. We should not be surprised to discover that in the very same context of speaking of marriage as an organic unit, as a “one flesh” unified body, Paul states that the wife/body “is subject” (appended/posted in the shelter) to the husband/head, and the husband/head “will cleave” (glue) to the wife/body. They are interdependent and connected similarly to the way the systems of our bodies are interdependent and connected.

Such an understanding of the Bible as supporting bonding, interdependence, and unity within marriage echoes Gottman’s laboratory findings quoted earlier as he has studied the science of a good marriage. The double bind placed on wives by much evangelical teaching on wifely submission in marriage is man made and should be cast off in favor of encouraging couples to embrace the “double BOND” which God intended.

## Endnotes:

1. Gottman, John "The Marriage Clinic" page 52 [emphasis added]

This observation led me to formulate the hypothesis that **marriages work to the extent that men accept influence from, share power with women.** Next I applied this to a longitudinal study of 130 nonviolent newlywed couples and found that, amazingly, those in which the **men who did not accept influence from their wives wound up divorced.** The prediction rate was very good, 80% accuracy, and it did not work the other way around: Most wives accepted influence from their husbands, and the acceptance predicted nothing. (Gottman)

2. Professor Bruce Ware writes:

As one reads Paul's and Peter's admonitions that are directed specifically to husbands and wives, one notes that there is a particular imperative given to wives in each of such cases, regardless of the larger context. In each case, wives are told one thing, the same thing, in all four of these New Testament passages: They are told to "submit to" or "be subject to" or be "submissive to" their husbands. Here they are for the reader to see:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24).

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Col 3:18).

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled (Titus 2:3-5).

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives-when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external-the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing-but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in

God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening (1 Pet 3:1-6).

It would seem a simple and yet a highly significant observation to make, from these texts, that every single direct imperative and admonition to wives requires of them the same responsibility: Besides other things that are said to them, they are commanded in every case to submit to their husbands. The force of this point in the current debate is strong indeed, and it certainly is relevant to the question of whether the egalitarian position treats every aspect of Scripture fully and does not diminish or disregard any of it. The fact that four different New Testament letters contain this one common command to wives each time they are addressed specifically, and that both Paul and Peter share in common this same message and emphasis, and that the command is made to wives in different churches and different cultural settings, would incline one to conclude that this must be among the most important aspects of a wife's relationship to her husband. To miss this is to miss something highly significant about being a wife, as God intends it. And certainly, as Paul develops the point in Ephesians 5, the significance of the wife's submission can be understood more fully because God intends her submission to her husband to be a picture of the church's submission to Christ." (Ware)

3. Of the seven New Testament instances where wifely submission is addressed, in only two cases is the *hupotasso* verb in its imperative form. (1 Corinthians 14:34 and Colossians 3:18 are assigned passive **imperative** by biblos and middle **imperative** by Scripture4all). Grammatically, imperative is the mood which is used for a "command". The combination of imperative mood with passive voice presents a mixed message and interpretational dilemma. ([Bgreek](#)).<sup>2</sup> However, for the sake of argument, I will grant that the two occurrences of *hupotasso* with imperative mood indicate "command". The case of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is not included in Ware's list of wifely submission verses, perhaps because it occurs within a confusing and ambiguous context which warrants careful analysis beyond the scope of this paper ([Don Johnson](#)).

4. The King James Bible which is based on the Textus Receptus (TR) has an extra *hupotasso* in Ephesians 5:22 (*hupotassesthe*) which is parsed in the middle voice in the Greek English interlinear at [www.scripture4all.org](http://www.scripture4all.org). The earliest and oldest manuscript called "P46" omits the verb in Eph 5:22. Interestingly, the providential discovery of this manuscript did not occur until the 1930's ([P46](#)). I presume that the *hupotassesthe* in Eph 5:22 Textus Receptus is an unfortunate interpretational scribal addition which has served to obscure the truth about the meaning of wives being subject "to their husbands in everything".. "as the church is subject to

Christ".

5. **double bind**

-noun

a situation in which a person is given conflicting cues such that to obey one cue is to disobey the other. (Dictionary.com)

6. Professor Dorothy Patterson writes:

**Truth #10 Wives are called upon to submit themselves to their own husbands in all things.** Biblical submission is the yielding of humble and intelligent obedience to a person in authority over you. By nature, it is a choice. Scripture never suggests submitting yourself to abusive tyranny. A wife's submission is not so much to her husband as it is to God and to His plan for marriage. The only exception to this submission is when you are asked to submit to something in direct violation of God's Word (Acts 5:29). To obey only "reasonable requests," of course, could be more selfish license than good judgment. ([Dorothy Patterson](#))

7. "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials **exercise authority over** them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" (Matthew 20:25-28- NIV)

8. On the CBMW website, in refuting the possibility of "source" as a meaning for the Greek kephale/head, David Kotter explains, "Plato describes the "head" as the ' . . . divinest part of us which **controls all the rest . . .**'" ([Kotter](#)). Rebecca Jones, also on CBMW, speaks of the extent of **control** a husband should have [emphasis added]:

A wife's job in submitting to her husband is far more than simply acquiescing when his will happens to cross hers, or allowing him to make decisions without objecting. A wife is to bring all things together under one head, her husband. In other words, in the sphere of her home, where her husband is head, she is to gather, collect, and submit all those things that are under her supervision (including her children!) to **her husband's control**. ([Jones](#))

9. Imperative is a Greek verb "mood" which is identified by its distinctive form. Greek verbs change form based upon the subject of the verb and the kind of action indicated. There are five basic parts (or aspects) that are clearly defined or indicated by every Greek verb form: Person, Number, Tense, Voice, and Mood. ([ntgreek.org](#)). The aspects relevant to my thesis are voice and mood.

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