



The Bible mentions subjugation of wives and everyone gets upset, but Christian Grey does it and nobody bats an eye! Tell me how this makes sense.

I know why this is the case. There is absolute confusion in our culture about sex, love, pleasure, intimacy, marriage, and the Catholic Church. There is such a tangled web of lies that this culture of death has woven under the dictatorship of relativism and individualism that I cannot even begin to unravel them here. I can, however, tell the truth about the Catholic vision of relationships and marriage.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians describes a transformation of marriage from a social institution to a sacramental sign of the love between Christ and the Church. He writes, *"Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church."* (Ephesians 5:22-23) This is where the flags go up and people get upset. Why should she have to be subject to him? What does that mean? She has to be his slave? Why is the wife getting the short end of the stick? This line of thought is easily followed up by a total shut down of the person reading or discussing the passage and a refusal to accept anything further.

If this were the end of the passage, maybe there would be cause for questions and anger, but Paul continues, *"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her..."* (Ephesians 5:25) OK, so wives need to subject themselves to their husbands, whose mission it is to love those women as Christ loved the Church, which was by dying for Her! More than a husband's mission, this is his command, and the only context in which the imperative is used in the Greek text. Where as the call for women to submit is never even expressed with it's own verb, only referencing the verb used in a previous verse in reference to the Church, husbands are explicitly given this command to love.

Having looked at these verses, I see a few things. First, wives are to be subject to their own husbands. That does not indicate that women as a whole are to be inferior to men, but that wives be subject to their own husbands. Second, there is the element of free will and choice. That is, to be a subject is to make one's self subject to another. In marriage, this is a free choice to submit to another. Finally,

the thing that wives are asked to subject themselves to is not abuse or use, but to love. The love of Jesus, which husbands are called to imitate, is self-giving. Jesus says in Mark 10:45, "The son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) He is the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The call for husbands to love is also a call to submit to their wives, in the image of Christ.

So, why is there confusion about this passage and the idea of subjugation between the spouses in marriage? The confusion is due to a false definition of love. The command that the husband love his wife is not seen as a call to service and mutual subjugation. Love is not defined in our culture as a self-giving and self-emptying choice, but as desire, as pleasure, as self-fulfillment, and as eros. If that is the culture's definition of love, then this passage ought to disturb us as a command for wives to serve and submit while their husbands must only live up to this weak definition of love which is really just selfishness. But, when we see love through the lens of the Church, whose life is sustained by the emptying out of Jesus, body and soul, day after day, then the submission which Paul speaks of is not a burden, but a privilege. I consider myself more spoiled than a servant, that it is my calling to submit to, and to accept the self-giving, and not self-seeking, love of my husband and to return it.

Granted, Paul makes this call to be a living sign of the love between Christ and the Church to fallen people. Husbands will fail to love as Jesus, and wives will fail to receive and return that love. In these cases, it is not asked that either spouse, particularly wives, yield to their spouse's every whim. Pope Pius XI in *Casti Connubii* writes that, "This subjection, however, does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband's every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to wife." The command of a wife to submit does not ask that she ever submit to mistreatment or abuse, but to the love initiated by her husband, in line with reason and dignity, in the image of Jesus. And although some may interpret this passage as a subjugation of wives and of women as a whole, the interpretation of the Church, which guides our actions, does nothing to devalue, but rather elevates women as the direction and recipient of man's love.

The ways in which this teaching plays out in the lives of spouses is as varied and complicated as the spouses themselves. In my life, it means that sometimes my husband gets me a gift I don't necessarily love, but that I express gratitude for without comment or complaint. It means that sometimes my husband asks what I want for dinner, and he makes whatever I ask for, even if he hates it. It means that if I ask him to, he will get up with our children on a Saturday morning, even if it was technically "my turn". It means seeing that he is having a tough day, and taking the kids out of the house even if that wasn't part of my plan. It means to live as Paul writes in Ephesians 5: 1, *"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you."*