

WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:
HAVE WE MISUNDERSTOOD ‘WIVES SUBMIT’?

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Our full article takes up Mike Winger’s kind invitation to give feedback. We hope you will enjoy reading it. Here’s a quick summary in just two pages.

QUICK SUMMARY OF ARTICLE ON WIVES’ SUBMISSION by Andrew Bartlett and Terran Williams

The question in the title of Mike’s Part 9 video is: Have We Misunderstood “Wives Submit”? Our response is that Mike has misunderstood ‘wives submit’.

Mike’s view that there is a God-ordained authority imbalance in the marriage relationship. But he unwittingly mis-handles and misinterprets 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5 (with Colossians 3:18-19 and Titus 2:5), and 1 Peter 3:1-7. We show that Paul and Peter teach equality and mutual submission in Christian marriage.

Mike’s examination of **1 Corinthians 7** is superficial and flawed. It is the longest chapter in the New Testament about the relations of men and women as regards marriage, but Mike considers only three verses. And he misreads those three verses as teaching only about sexual relations in marriage, even though Paul expressly teaches about joint prayer and about decision-making.

It is the only passage in the New Testament which speaks expressly of the husband’s authority in marriage – and it specifies the wife’s authority with identical words. Paul is unmistakably teaching equality of authority in marriage. The whole chapter supports this.

It is the only passage in the New Testament which explicitly teaches how decisions should be taken in marriage: by mutual consent.

Paul’s teaching shows that husband and wife should live in gracious, mutual submission. 1 Corinthians 7 stands in direct contradiction of Mike’s view.

Mike interprets **Ephesians 5** as supporting his view. But he makes some foundational mistakes:

- He misunderstands the meaning of Paul’s word for ‘submit’. This leads him to misinterpret what Paul writes.
- He starts his exposition in mid-sentence, which disables him from understanding the context and accurately tracing Paul’s train of thought.
- He does not pay close attention to Paul’s Greek text but instead relies mainly on an English translation. This leads to multiple errors of understanding.
- He ignores Paul’s own explanation of his ‘head’ metaphor, as applied to the husband.

To understand what Paul writes in this passage, and especially to interpret his head-and-body metaphor in verse 23, it is necessary to take the precautions of considering the whole context,

looking closely at the exact words, tracing Paul's train of thought, considering his reasons for writing, and taking a Christ-centered canonical approach.

Mike's interpretation is in conflict with-

- the mutual submission described in Ephesians 5:21,
- the nature of the submission commended in Ephesians 5:22, 24 (of the same kind as in 5:21),
- Paul's own explanation of his head-body metaphor in Ephesians 5:23 ('savior of the body'),
- the first word of Ephesians 5:24 (*alla* – 'but'),
- the nature of Paul's instructions to husbands in Ephesians 5:25-33a, which are all about humble service and say nothing about exercising authority, and
- Paul's use of Genesis in Ephesians 5:31.

We conclude that Mike's interpretation of Ephesians 5 (and likewise of Colossians 3:18-19 and of Titus 2:5) is not correct. God has not placed husbands in higher authority over their wives. Marriage is a relationship of mutual submission.

While both husbands and wives are called to love and respect each other, Paul's *distinctive emphases* to wives (respect) and to husbands (love) reflect the practical situations for which he is writing.

Paul calls upon first-century Christian husbands to let go of their legal and societal privileges and voluntarily to take the lowest place of humble service to their wives, following the example of Christ's humble service to his body, the church. Still today, the husband should model the love of Christ by continually taking the initiative to step out in humble, self-sacrificial service to his wife.

Mike interprets **1 Peter 3:1-7** as supporting his own view. In doing so, he makes seven mistakes and misreads what Peter says.

When Mike insists on his interpretation, that Peter is endorsing a God-given unilateral authority of husband over wife, Mike is adding to Scripture a reason for wives' submission which Peter does not give.

1 Peter 3:7 is not a call to Christian husbands to exercise authority over their wives. When we study Peter's exact words and analyze them in the context of his train of thought, this is certain, beyond any doubt. If the husband seeks to exercise authority over his wife, rather than humbly honoring her as a co-heir of God, their prayers will be hindered.

Peter's view of marriage is fully consistent with the equality and mutual submission that we saw in Paul's letters, in 1 Corinthians 7 and in Ephesians 5. If we are to be obedient to the Lord, those of us who are married will put that vision into practice in our own marriages.