

The Relationships and Responsibilities of Husbands and Wives

Ephesians 5:22-33

Ephesians 5:22-33 – *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Background Notes

Ephesians 4 began the second half of this great epistle. The second half is a series of exhortations or instructions that are based on the doctrine that is taught in chapters 1-3 of the letter.

In Ephesians 5:18, believers are instructed to be filled with Spirit - in fact, this verse can be translated, “be *continually* filled with the Spirit.” In our last Talk we saw that the filling of the Spirit is not the same as the indwelling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit *indwells* every believer, but every believer is not necessarily *filled* with the Holy Spirit. We also saw that the filling of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost when the Church was formed as the Body of Christ. When we are saved, we are brought into that Body of Christ, which has already been Spirit-baptized. So, the filling of the Spirit is not the same as the indwelling of the Spirit, and it is not the same as the baptism of the Spirit.

We saw that being filled with the Spirit means that we are under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit, and thus the Spirit-filled believer has certain characteristics. These characteristics are not the display of certain spiritual gifts, or having certain ecstatic experiences. The characteristics of the Spirit-filled believer are given in Ephesians 5:19-21. The Spirit-filled believer sings spiritual songs (v19), gives thanks for all things (v20), and submits to authority structures (v21).

From Ephesians 5:22 all the way through 6:9 the apostle Paul elaborates on this third characteristic of the Spirit-filled believer: submitting to authority structures. The authority structure in verses 22-33 is the home.

Doctrinal Point

Believers should submit to one another.

a. **Wives should respect their husbands.** *“And the wife must respect her husband” (v33); “wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” (v22); and “so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” (v24).* This is certainly not a popular teaching, is it? But this is what the Bible teaches.

It's important to emphasize that submitting to authority does *not* mean inferiority! Subordination is not synonymous with inferiority. It is true that the abuse of authority may make people feel inferior when they are required to submit, but there is no implication in the Bible that to be submissive is to be inferior or less than equal. Remember, our Lord was subject to His Heavenly Father - but He was in no way inferior to the Father, and He was *never* less than equal to the Father.

“Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” The phrase *“as to the Lord”* does not mean that the wife should pretend that her husband is the Lord! No way! This phrase implies 2 things.

First, the phrase *“as to the Lord”* means that the wife recognizes that God has set up the authority structure for the home, and thus she is submitting to the Lord. *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”* So, when the Christian wife submits to her husband, she is submitting to the Lord because she recognizes that the Lord, not society, has ordained this authority structure for the home.

Second, the phrase *“as to the Lord”* does not mean that she should obey her husband rather than obeying the Lord's commands. For example, if a non-Christian husband asked his wife to get an abortion, she would refuse to obey her husband because she would obey the Lord's higher command. Normally, however, even non-Christian husbands don't ask their Christian wives to do things that are directly contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

The godly behavior of a Christian wife who respects her unbelieving husband in a “mixed marriage” can have wonderful results. Read 1 Peter 3:1-2. Wives should respect their husbands.

b. **Husbands should love their wives** (v25). *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”* This is also part of recognizing and submitting to the authority structure that God has set up for the home. Notice that the husbands are not told to “keep their wives in subjection”! They are told to love their wives. It's often been said that any wife would automatically and gladly submit to her husband if he truly loved her as Christ loves the Church!

The word that is used for love here is *agape*. It is not romantic love or sexual love. *Agapeo* is the kind of love that requires the husband to deny himself and his desires in the interest of his wife. That's the kind of love Christ has

demonstrated for His Church. That's the kind of love that husbands are instructed to show to their wives. Well, husbands, how are we doing? Does any husband want to say, "Yup, I have loved my wife as Christ loves the Church ever since we were married"? Really?? How about for the last week? How about for the last 24 hours? Not easy to answer, is it? We husbands are called to love our wives as Christ loves His bride, the Church.

Notice three aspects of the Lord's love for His Church that is taught in this passage: past, present and future.

Past - In verse 25, we have the past aspect of our Lord's love for us - our redemption: "*Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her.*" Our Lord voluntarily went to the cross and gave His life in order save us by taking on Himself the penalty for our sins.

Present - In verse 26, we have the present aspect of our Lord's love for us - our sanctification: "*That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.*" Sanctification is the process whereby believers are made more like Jesus. That's God's goal for us (Romans 8:2-29)! Notice the key ingredient in our sanctification: the Word of God. The "washing of water" in this verse is not baptism – it is the cleansing action of the Word of God. Just as a bath can't get you clean if you don't get into the tub, so the Lord can't keep you clean if you don't get into the Word!

Future - In verse 27, we have the future aspect of our Lord's love for us - our glorification: "*That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*" What a great time that will be, when we are in our eternal, resurrected bodies in Heaven! There will be no physical blemishes such as sickness or scars or wrinkles - but even better, there will be no blemishes from sin! We will be free from sin - and even from the capability of sinning - forever. The Body of Christ will be holy and without blemish forever.

"*So husbands ought to love their own wives*" (v28). In other words, in view of these great truths about the love relationship between Christ and His Church - past, present and future - husbands should love their wives. Husbands will in some measure reflect that love that exists between Christ and the Church by the way they love their wives.

This whole passage teaches us that the relationship between husbands and wives is to be a reflection of the love relationship between Christ and His Body, the Church. "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church*" (v31-32). What an awesome responsibility we have here, husbands and wives! The world is watching. Don't distort the beautiful spiritual picture that God wants to portray to the world through your marriage.

Practical Application

Let's follow the "Golden Rule" of marriage!

This application is directed particularly towards husbands. So, husbands, what's the Golden Rule of marriage? It's given twice in this passage: in verse 28: "*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies,*" and in verse 33, "*Let*

each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself." Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, or just as they love themselves. They should care for their wives as if their wives were their own bodies. They should love their wives just as Christ loves the Church!

Well, just in case one of you husbands has a hard time understanding exactly what it means to love your wife as Christ loves the Church, a very practical gauge is given here. Do you love and care for your wife as much as you care for yourself? According to verse 29, we "nourish and cherish" our own bodies. We make sure we care for and protect ourselves. Do we do that for our wives? We make sure we get included in what's going on. Do we do that for our wives? We make sure we guard ourselves in areas where we're sensitive or weak. Do we do that for our wives?

1 Peter 3:7 says, *"Husbands... be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."* Husbands, are your prayers being hindered because of you don't honor and love and care for your wife? Let's hope you're not letting your wife carry the heavier part of the load in raising your children, or in keeping the family and home together. Men, let's love our wives, and thus follow the Golden Rule of marriage!