

Perfect Harmony

Ephesians 5:21-33

Central Idea: The roles of husband and wife in marriage are reflections of Christ's relationship with His Church.

Introduction

Although I am not yet married, I come to our passage today well aware of its ability to insight quite the conversation between men and women, husbands and wives. I've heard it said about Jesus that some love Him and some hate Him but very few are on the fence about Him. Well, it is the same for our passage this morning. Some love it and some hate it, but very rarely have I heard anyone sit on a fence about it.

As we have been talking about marriage, I am saddened by the many different interpretations and arguments over this passage, what it originally meant, how right or wrong it is, etc. This is the Word of God. And today, as I preach it, though I don't have endless illustrations about my personal involvement or experience in marriage, I believe God wants to speak to every person in this place from this passage. All too often, we find that we come to the Bible with certain presuppositions, certain lenses or paradigms that can keep us from hearing God. Women will bock at the "submission" word while men smile with great happiness. Men will agree with the "love" word without hearing the "sacrifice" part.

I have seen people take this passage and use it for their personal views rather than allow Scripture to reprove and challenge them in their ability to obey what the word says. In Ephesians 5, one of the most prominent passages on husbands and wives, I find that many approach this text with their past hurts, abuses or their emotional walls already up. But if we do that, we will miss the challenge inherent in the passage for all today. Let us take a look at the passage concerning the roles of husbands and wives and be challenged to do better today!

Text – Ephesians 5:21-33

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way

husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

I. Wives are called to respect their husbands.

A. Submission is not a dirty word.

- i. America is a country in which different ideas and philosophies get free air time in the marketplace and in our society. That is a good freedom to have and it challenges us to not allow one wrong idea to persist.
- ii. But it can also be used to destroy the biblical principles that build a system that God has designed, and that can happen when we come to a word like “submit.”
- iii. In fact, women are not the only ones who have a problem with that word. Every human being has a problem with it. It is not in our nature to submit to anything, especially in such an individualistic culture that worships the underdog who beats “the man” and the powers that be.
- iv. So no one likes verses 21-22, and least of all, most women, since wives are specifically addressed. But it might be interesting, and revealing, for those who read an English translation of this passage to know a few key framing points about Ephesians 5.
- v. First of all, submission means what we think it means. It means giving up on one’s own desires and demands to be subservient to someone else’s. It means humbling ourselves and giving another leadership.
- vi. So many pastors and teachers try to lessen the blow of the meaning of submission, but I will not play that game this morning. I am convinced that the Scriptures call us out of what we were into what God wants us to be, and sometimes, that hurts!
- vii. Second you will notice that this section with submission in it is actually more to it than that the word submission is actually not the main point for a Ephesians 5 verses 18 through 24 receipt in Greek that is the whole one sentence from verses 18 to 2406 verses are one sentence in Greek.
- viii. The main ideas in this sentence are, “Do not get drunk” and the other is, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” So we could take this passage to be saying one of the signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit is the way that a husband and wife interact with one another in marriage.
- ix. To be sure there are a host of other verbs in this six verse sentence that also demonstrate being filled with the Holy Spirit like singing and making

music in your heart to the Lord, like being thankful and all of the other -ING verbs display those characteristics.

- x. Submitting starts with the church of believers. We submit to one another when the Holy Spirit speaks to others. We submit to the Word of God preached. We submit to the leaders God has put in place.
- xi. **Application:** Submission is first a matter of the heart, a willingness to humble oneself before another. If the attitude is one of selfishness, submission is impossible. Is there anyone in your life you are willing to submit to? If you can't submit to anyone at all, then you have a heart problem, an attitude problem, and your church life and your home life will suffer tremendously for it! First, get a humble heart before God, then submission will not be such a dirty word.

B. Respect is not a suggestion.

- i. There are two specific words Paul uses in this passage on marriage for wives. The first is to submit to their own husbands. By the way, that means that wives don't submit to every man, but to their husband.
- ii. Submission has to do with authority and leadership. But along with leadership comes greater responsibility. As Spider-Man learned from his Uncle Ben, "With great power comes great responsibility."
- iii. Just like the leaders in the Kingdom of God, such as pastors, husbands as the leaders of their homes will stand before God and be judged for how they led their families.
- iv. While many women chafe against the verses talking about submission, they most likely would not like to endure that evaluation by God in heaven. The fact is through submission, we place that responsibility on someone else.
- v. To refuse to submit is to desire the weight of leading. And God will pay very close attention. The situations that result from choices bring stress and trial when we make the wrong choices. It is the husband who will bear the weight of bad choices for his family.
- vi. **Illustration:** If you go back the whole way to Genesis as we were talking about in the first message in this series, and look at Genesis 3:6, we see that Adam was with Eve while the serpent spoke to them. He did not stop his wife. He did not lead her spiritually. They did not communicate. Fast-forward to the New Testament, and who is the first to sin? Not Eve. In Romans 5:12-21, Adam is the one who sinned against God and allowed death to enter the world.
- vii. God made men to lead. Some are timid in their leadership, and some don't realize they are leaders. Others don't want to be leaders or shirk their responsibility as a leader. But they cannot deny how God has made them!

- viii. Another word that is used in verse 33 is the word respect. In the original it is the same word that is used earlier in verse 21, “In the fear of Christ.” This is a respect that is representative of the Old Testament idea of the fear of the Lord as well.
- ix. However, it is the idea of respect or of favoring your husband’s decisions. You see, while husbands love to quote verse 22, they do not realize that their job is just as hard, if not harder, to love only their wives.
- x. **Illustration:** What many do not know is that Aretha Franklin’s hit *Respect* was actually written by a man, Otis Redding, in 1965. The lyrics were rewritten in places and the song became a hit, and many feminists would make it their anthem. But originally, that song was about a man crying out for respect in his home.
- xi. Men seem to have an intuitive understanding of what respect is and how it is earned, and yet in their own homes, where their whole personality is hidden from no one, they do not earn respect there.
- xii. Paul calls on the wives to show respect to their husbands, because for men, to be shown respect is a debt that must be repaid by giving respect. So by humbly obeying these Scriptural precedents, wives actually start the process of respect.

II. Husbands are called to love their wives.

A. Love is not what you think it is.

- i. While the wives are challenged to respect and submit to their husbands, husbands are equally challenged to love their wives. Throughout this section of Paul’s letters, he challenges both sides in relationships.
- ii. This is the first part of what is generally called the Household Codes. There were other codes in secular and Greek and Roman societies. While many of them have the part about submission for wives, they usually don’t tell husbands what to do.
- iii. Husbands in these ancient household codes were left to decide how they wanted to run their own marriages and houses. Although they had been given the leadership responsibility, it was theirs to do with as they please.
- iv. You will notice that husbands, parents and masters hold the power in these codes. But unlike the codes of the ancient times, the Bible holds those with the responsibility of leadership to a high standard.
- v. A master could do whatever he wished to his slaves. A parent could be as loving or harsh as they wished to their children, and a husband generally would treat his wife so badly that she might have been better off as a slave.

- vi. But the Bible holds those with power to a grave responsibility, and Paul challenges the men after acknowledging that they have the power of leadership in the home that they must love their wives.
- vii. This means that the wife was not to be treated like a slave, but more like an equal, which goes with how the Bible portrays marriage as a whole. She is not a slave to do the husband's bidding. She is a partner working side-by-side with him in life.
- viii. Paul is quite specific about the kind of love expected out of each Christian husband. He is to love his wife with a sacrificial love, the same demonstrated by Christ.
- ix. So what does Christ's love look like? Most men would tell you that they love their wives. They would point to provision and protection they give to their wives.
- x. And it is true that Christ's sacrificial love is the kind in which He did in fact die for His bride, the Church. He provided for salvation at the cross. He protected her from the wickedness and the evil one of this world at the cross.
- xi. But these are not what Paul highlights when he speaks of Christ's sacrificial love. Look at the descriptors of Christ's love, the actions He took for her.
- xii. Christ wanted to make His church holy and blameless, to dedicate her to service in His Kingdom, to cleanse her through the study of His Word, and to present her as spotless and blameless.
- xiii. While scholars describe these actions on Christ's part in different ways, the fact that Christ's love is shown by how He enhances the Church is clear from the verses.
- xiv. The challenge for husbands is not only to sacrificially provide for their wives and families and to sacrificially protect them from harm and danger, but also to sacrificially cultivate them and make them better as a person.
- xv. As her husband, part of your job, if you are to love as Christ loves, is to enhance her life, to cultivate her gifts and her talents, to lead her into greatness, and to be her biggest supporter in life.
- xvi. Most husbands don't even think of that as part of their duty as a loving husband. They are not only to make final decisions in the home, but also to lead spiritually, to make their wives blossom into the women they are destined to be.
- xvii. **Application:** Is your wife the very best that she can be? Have you stifled her abilities or talents? Have you kept her from growing spiritually, in knowledge of God's Word, or in any other way? Are you leading her into greatness? These are how you love your wife. The first part is true, that

you should provide and protect, but also that you should perfect her! What can you do to make your wife better today?

B. Submission is not what you think it is.

- i. So many husbands like to quote from the verse about wives submitting, and then say they are loving their wives. They like to use this passage one-sidedly, which makes the passage completely ineffective.
- ii. Men innately understand what it means to have someone's respect, and they understand what it takes to earn respect. The biggest joke is when a guy demands respect, but doesn't respect others.
- iii. It's the same way for a positional leader in a church. A pastor or a deacon can think they are a leader, but you're only a leader if people follow your vision. These are the people that remind you of their position of power, but they have to remind you because you don't recognize them as actually being an authority.
- iv. In the same way, husbands tend to quote this verse to demand that their wives submit to them, and yet they are demanding it because they don't already have it. They don't naturally command the respect they think they deserve.
- v. You shouldn't have to demand that your wife submits to you. If you love her sacrificially and treat her as precious, you will find that she has no trouble respecting you or submitting.
- vi. From work to home, the principles of earning respect and leadership do not change. A husband might say, "But Pastor, I get home from a long day's work and I want her to do this or that or leave me alone or serve me or whatever."
- vii. It doesn't work like that. She has been busy too. And her work is no less important or stressful or tiring than yours. Do you ever give her time to relax? You can't demand time to relax if you don't give her any.
- viii. You also can't expect for her to agree with your final decision and submit to your leadership if you don't count in her perspective and ask her what she thinks.
- ix. Some husbands make a decision without any communication or thought to what their wives might be able to contribute in the decision. Including her in all parts of life and leadership brings her into the fold, and it also shows her that you care what she thinks.
- x. If a husband led in that way, when a decision came up that gave a true difference in approach between husband and wife, when the husband makes the final decision, the wife will think, "He wants my best. He may be wrong, but at least he is leading, and he will be responsible for the outcome to continue to love me and protect and provide."

- xi. She will find it easier to submit to the husband's decision, even if she doesn't think it was the right one. He did not leave her in the dark or in the cold. He explained his reasoning, listened to hers and made the best decision for the family. Most women don't even get that out of their marriages.
- xii. **Application:** Do you use Scripture to command your wife to be submissive or respectful? It doesn't work that way. If your wife is not doing this already, perhaps you are not loving her as Christ loved the Church. It's not always true that this is what is happening, but as usual in Christianity, when you think there's a problem with others, it is best to check inside yourself, then others. I challenge the husbands in our church to love sacrificially and lead their homes spiritually!

III. Marriages are called to exemplify Christ and the Church.

A. Wives represent the body of Christ.

- i. Now we have looked at the trees in the forest, the details of what is desired and even expected of Spirit-filled marriages. Let us now turn to the larger picture, the forest itself.
- ii. Paul did not randomly choose these two commands for wives and husbands just because he felt like it. In fact, following these two commands respectively brings a system of effectiveness to marriages.
- iii. There are two points to conclude our study on the roles of husbands and wives in marriage. The first is that marriage is a smaller picture of Christ's relationship with His Church. The second is that when these roles are fulfilled by each spouse, the marriage will be more satisfying.
- iv. First, we see that these are images of Christ and the Church. The wives represent the Church in this image of marriage. Think about the relationship of the Church to Christ for a moment.
- v. Does the church ever challenge Christ or talk about His bad qualities, or nag Him or any of these things? I grant that Christ is perfect, and you may not think your husband is, but that is precisely the issue.
- vi. What would change in him if you began to show him respect, began to tell him what you like about him and some of his good qualities? How would he begin to respond to you if you spent more time telling him about what you are grateful for in him than telling him about his bad traits?
- vii. One of the biggest challenges in marriages is the desire to do what is natural, but not to obey Scripture and do what the Bible tells you to. What do you do if your husband is less than what you thought he would be?
- viii. Well, you can pray for him, encourage him, and exhort him. You can also earn the right to speak to him about these traits that do not resemble Christ from your perspective.

- ix. If you spend most of your communication encouraging him, when it comes time to deal with something not so Christ-like, he can't say you're nagging him.
- x. There is also help outside of these options through counseling and accountability through church. But what I have found much of the time is that the problems in a marriage are not one-sided. Almost all of the time, both husband and wife have things they need to work on.
- xi. Don't ever give up. You married this person for a reason. At least at one time, you did respect them and love them. Although it may be different now, there was something that you chose that person to live life with. Do you remember what it was?
- xii. Try making a list of why you married him. Is he so different from that person you married? Sometimes we marry based on traits we think are endearing that soon become not so endearing.
- xiii. **Application:** Your better marriage starts with you. Are you the very best that you can be for him? Are you trying your hardest to respect him? Do you follow your God-given nature or do you do what you would have done in your life before Christ? Do you acknowledge when he does get it right?

B. Husbands represent the Head Christ.

- i. Throughout the Bible, even from Genesis, the husband has been the leader, the head, as Paul talks about him. He is the one who is responsible for his family physically, spiritually, financially and socially.
- ii. The image here is not just of wives who represent the Church, but husbands who represent Christ. The way that Christ and the Church interact with one another is the way husbands and wives should interact with each other.
- iii. There is in fact in Ephesians 5 a direct parallel between the two images. They are meant to express the same intimate relationship. And this is a system that works well when both members do their parts.
- iv. Wives might not like to hear that the husband is responsible before God for how he leads his family, but that fact is borne out in Scripture. Adam is the one who brings sin into the world, not Eve, though she was clearly the first to rebel.
- v. Did you ever wonder why Adam did not lead his wife in the garden? They are both there in Genesis 3:6, but there is no mention of Adam reminding his wife that God has said not to eat of that fruit. He is a silent, complicit partner in sin.
- vi. So men have a history of not stepping up to the plate and leading. And women know this. That is why they don't want to submit. Why submit to

- someone who will not lead as Christ but rather push their power and weight around to abuse their wives mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and maybe even physically?
- vii. All of that power the husband has can damage his wife irreparably if he does not lead as a servant and love as Christ. No one wants to be hurt, so she doesn't submit, protecting herself from her husband, and keeping them from the intimacy God intended marriage to be. She doesn't feel safe, so she doesn't open up.
 - viii. Men will stand before God and bear their responsibility for how they led their families. There is a time of evaluation at the end, and I will stand there and be judged based on how I led this church as a pastor. In the same way, husbands will be judged based on how they have led their families.
 - ix. It was that way with Adam, and it is that way with every husband. So what will Christ say about your leadership and your marriage? Will He be pleased or is there something you can do, something within your power, to make things better for your spouse and your family?
 - x. The same applies here for husbands as it did for wives. You may say, "But Pastor, you have no idea what this wife is like when no one's around! You don't realize what I have to deal with at home!"
 - xi. That may be true. Just as some husbands don't work on becoming better husbands, some wives would rather blame their husbands than work on themselves.
 - xii. Start with yourself. Are you leading in a godly way? Are you protecting, providing for and cultivating your wife? Are you making every effort to make her the very best she can be, to reach her destiny in Christ?
 - xiii. Are you seeking God and obeying when He brings something to your attention about your character or walk with Him? Are you growing more like the image of Christ?
 - xiv. Are you earning her respect, or demanding it? Do you love her with your whole being? Sometimes it's easier to say you'd die for her, but you must live for her as well!
 - xv. In the same way as for wives, there are resources available to you for your marriage if you are struggling to follow these commands of Christ. But you have to lead to this better possible marriage.
 - xvi. Perhaps the reasons she reacts to you have to do with you not being the man of God you should be. And perhaps she really is the one who is the problem, but as I said, it is unusual for one person in a marriage to be the problem. Most of the time, it's two imperfect people not budging to improve.

- xvii. Cultivate your wife by encouraging her and blessing her, by explaining why she is lovely and what her good qualities are. Too many times a husband hurts his wife by bringing up all of the things he doesn't like about her.
- xviii. But you married her because of something in her that you love. What is it? People marry for reasons. What were your reasons for this woman and not another? Did you marry just to be married, or just for a physical relationship? Marriage is so much more than that.
- xix. If that is the case, it is time to discover her good qualities and love her for who she is, and to cultivate her. It is a challenge, but God put you two together. Don't beat her down with how horrible of a person or wife you think she is.
- xx. If you believe you are being godly and obedient in your own life, then when you seek to bring up her faults, do it in a loving and truthful way. Think about how it sounds to her when you speak. You don't have to sacrifice tact and kindness for truth.
- xxi. Application: I challenge all of the husbands in this room to love and lead in a godly way, as Christ loves and leads His church. Earn respect by being a man of godly character and integrity. Love your wife in all of these ways. Cultivate her and build her up. Make her better for yourself and for God. Protect her from danger. Provide for her needs.

Conclusion

So the question must be asked if all of this is what is expected of husbands and wives: "Who has to start this process?" If my husband doesn't love me, why should I start respecting him? If my wife doesn't respect me, what's there to love? I answer your question with another: How is this attitude working for you? Is it working? The strife between husband and wife when Christ and His principles are not at the center of their marriage must be intolerable. That is why people look for divorce and others to fill these roles. She looks for someone who pays attention to her. He looks for someone who doesn't nag him. And both of them violate the marriage covenant and the standards of God, not to mention the expectations that God has for them. The answer to who should initiate their roles in the marriage is you. For husbands who want respect, they must be the ones to step out and love their wives sacrificially. For wives who want to be loved and cherished, they must step out and respect and submit to their husbands. Together, you can make your marriage not only work, but be happy and desirable.

Action Points

- Wives: Are you seeking to respect your husband and submit to him when he must make a big decision? Do you support him in his efforts, spend more time talking him up than putting him down? What one thing can you do this week to show him more respect?

- Husbands: Are you loving her with sacrificial love, providing for all her needs, protecting her from all danger and cherishing and cultivating her to be the best she can be? What one thing do you need to do differently this week?
- If these commands from Scripture were easy to implement, they wouldn't have needed to be written down and commanded by God. As we grow more into the image of Christ, we will be challenged to do what does not come naturally. Try it for one month and observe the difference.