

Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*



Submitting... Out of Reverence for Christ

Part 2: Husbands Love Your Wives as Christ Loved the Church

(Ephesians 5:21-33 ESV)

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.

Introduction

illustration/story - main point

The next paragraph in our journey through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, is verses 25-33. It is part two in Paul's explanation of the phrase, "...**submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ**" (Eph 5:21). As we learned two weeks ago, this phrase is the third of three thumbnail characteristics that mark a person filled with the Holy Spirit.¹

The first mark of the person filled by the Holy Spirit (v.18) is the presence of song and whole-hearted corporate worship (v.19). The second is "*giving thanks always for everything*" (v.20). And the third characteristic is "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of what being filled with the Spirit looks like, but these three characteristics, in Paul's mind, are three clear indicators that the Holy Spirit is present in one's life. When the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of a follower of Jesus, these three areas will be among the most obvious places where change will be seen. When the Holy Spirit is at work, He works humility in our lives and enables believers to willingly submit to those in authority over them. The ability to willingly submit to those in authority over you is a work of the Spirit.

Paul is not eliminating all hierarchical relationships with this phrase, *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. We know this because he then immediately explains what kind of submission he has in mind by illustrating it through three sets of relationships.

The first is husbands and wives. Two weeks ago we focused on the call for wives to submit to their own husbands (5:22-24). Today we will consider the call for husbands to submit to Christ by loving their wives (5:25-33). The second relationship is children submitting to parents (6:1-4). And the third is servants submitting to their masters (6:5-9). Next week we will consider these final two sets of relationships; children submitting to parents and servants submitting to their masters (or employees submitting to supervisors).

¹ See Eph 5:18.

So, from the examples Paul uses to illustrate **Holy Spirit enabled** submission, it is clear that Paul is not eliminating all kinds of submission. He is illustrating that all God's children are under some form of authority and he is teaching us that it is only by the power of his Holy Spirit that we will be able to rightly live within that structure.

Wives Submit to Your Own Husbands

In explaining submission as it should be lived out within the household, in **5:22-24**, Paul first instructs **wives to submit to their own husbands**. You will recall that we noted that he does not command all women to submit to all men, but wives to submit to only the one man who is her husband, the one man to whom she is married.

Paul's reasoning for this is not based upon some supposed superiority in men or inferiority in women. His reasoning is based in the created order since, as he states in v.23, **the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church**. He bases this understanding² of headship upon the **order** of creation and the **purpose** of creation as it has been revealed in Genesis 2.

In Genesis 2 God explains that he created man first and then afterward created woman **from** man—by taking one of Adam's ribs.³ Woman was created **from** man. This fact is essential to understanding headship. Secondly, God states that the purpose for which he created women was to be a helpmate⁴ and companion **for** man. So the husband is the head of his wife, not because he is smarter or better equipped, but because women was created **from** man and **for** man. It is for these reasons that a wife should submit to her own husband. This is what we learned two weeks ago.

Husbands: Submit to Christ

Next Paul turns his attention to husbands. Husbands are not exempt from submission. They don't get a pass. They too, just like wives, are to live under submission. Husbands are under submission to Christ, but in a particular way. Husbands are to submit to Christ by loving their wives.

(Ephesians 5:25-33 ESV)

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*

Christ is to stand before the believer as the example to follow. This is true for every believer no matter your age or gender. Each of us are to emulate his life as we live ours. Yet, Jesus also serves as an example for husbands to follow as well. Just as love was the motivation behind all

² As he explains in 1 Cor 11:8-9.

³ Gn 2:21-23.

⁴ Gn 2:20.

that Christ did for the church (i.e. his people), so also love is to be the motivation that stands behind all that husbands do for their wives. **Husbands, love your wives.**

Does it seem odd to hear the word love issued as a command? *Husbands, love your wives.* It seems to me to be similar to saying, "When you eat ice cream, enjoy it!" If loving is a command that can be obeyed, then certainly it is much more than a mere emotion. Our culture would have us believe that love, true love, is some kind of uncontrollable, chance emotion that overtakes a person and is not to be resisted. It can't be controlled, it can only be embraced. If you're lucky it may happen to you, but "this doesn't happen everyday."⁵ And if this overwhelming, fluttery feeling fades, well then, it's time to move on.

That's not love. That's lust.

Looking to Jesus will help us understand true love. Paul fleshes out true love for us in these verses.

(Ephesians 5:25-27 ESV)

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.*

True Love is Self-Sacrificing

First, a husband submitted to Christ will love his wife with a self-sacrificing love. Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her**. Jesus poured himself out to the point of death for the sake of the church. Even so husbands, are to pour themselves out for the sake of their wives. Husbands are called to give up their own lives for their wives.

Don Lansaw Gave Himself Up for His Wife

Four years ago, in May of 2011, a 200 mph tornado ripped through Joplin Missouri. It struck the home of childhood sweethearts Don and Bethany Lansaw. Having lived their whole lives in a tornado prone area they knew what to do. They went into the innermost bathroom of their house. However, this storm was unlike any they had ever encountered.

As their house was being ripped apart, Don covered Bethany with pillows and pushed down into the bathtub and then laid on top of her to protect her from the shower of flying debris. When it was all over and Bethany opened her eyes she could see

⁵ Farmboy to Buttercup in "The Princess Bride."

daylight. Their house was completely destroyed. There was no roof. There were no walls. There was no house. She looked into the face of her husband and she could see that he was badly injured. She flagged down an ambulance, but they were unable to save him. One hundred and twenty five people were killed in Joplin that day and Don was one of them. Don Lansaw gave himself up for his wife.⁶

The instances where husbands will be called to give up their lives in this way are rare. However, the more difficult calling is the daily call to give up the sinful propensity to give precedence to his own personal preferences. Husbands, true love—Christlike love—is laying down the desire to demand your own way and take up the mantle of self-sacrificing servant leadership at home that considers the needs of your wife is more important than your own.⁷ Husbands, consider how you should apply these words at home.

(Philippians 2:3-5 ESV)

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Jesus Willingly Gave Himself Up

Husbands, you also need to notice that Jesus ***gave himself up*** for the church. This means he *willingly* chose to lay aside his own desires.⁸ He chose to die. No one took his life from him, in the sense that he had no control over his death.⁹ Jesus had complete control over his death. Remember he “yielded”¹⁰ up his spirit. He gave up his life. Just as Jesus willingly chose to lay down his life for the church, even so are husbands are to willingly lay down any sinful tendency to exercise the God-given role of headship in such a way that intends to dominate or lord his authority over his wife.

When we looked at the verb ‘submit,’ in verse 21, you will remember that it is written in the passive voice, which tells us that when Paul talks about submission he intends it to be voluntary and willing, not mandatory, forced, or obligatory. The reflexive pronoun, ‘himself,’ used here in v.25 communicates the same idea. Just as Jesus willingly chose to give himself up to death, so husbands are to willingly give themselves up in life-giving ways for their wives. The husband who loves his wife like Christ loves the church will love her with a self-sacrificing love.

⁶ Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1391145/Joplin-MO-tornado-Wife-talks-moment-husband-gave-life-save-her.html> accessed 22 Aug 2015.

⁷ Phil

⁸ Remember his prayer in the Gard of Gethsemane, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Mt 26:38-44; Lk 22:42).

⁹ Jn 10:18.

¹⁰ Mt 27:50.

True Love Leads Toward Holiness

Second, a husband who submits himself to Jesus will love his wife by *leading towards holiness*. The reason Jesus gave himself up for the church was to **sanctify** and **cleanse** her from every **spot, wrinkle, and blemish** so that she might be **holy** (vs.26-27).

Jesus is the only one who can save a person, so no husband is called to save his wife. The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies¹¹ the believer, and so no husband is called to replace the Holy Spirit in the life of his wife. (He couldn't do this if he wanted to.) However, the Holy Spirit does use means in working sanctification and other people are among the foremost of means.

God uses people, especially the ones closest to us to help us grow in sanctification. There is no one else on the face of this planet whom God has used more to further my sanctification than my wife. But husbands, God is calling you to lead your wives into a pursuit of holiness.

You are to be the leaders in your home by being the first to seek holiness. Husbands, are you the leaders in your home in ways of righteousness? Are you the first to say I'm sorry when you've offended your wife? Are you the quickest to ask for forgiveness after the argument? Do you regularly apply biblical principles in all your behavior at home? Does your wife see you reading your Bible more than you see her reading hers? Do you initiate times of prayer? Are you the first one to turn the channel or hit the 'off' button when something comes on that is unholy?

True love never leads towards sin, but always towards holiness. Husbands should never invite their wives into anything that is sinful or wrong. Husbands should lead their wives into all that is good and right and true and actively seek the things which lead to sanctification in their wives. A husband who loves his wife like Christ loves the church will lead toward holiness.

True Love is Future Oriented

Third, a husband who willingly submits himself to Christ will love in such a way *that it is future oriented*. Verse 27 tells us that the reason Jesus gave up his life in order to effect the holiness of the church is **so that he might present the church to himself in splendor**.

The language here is reminiscent of a bride being presented to her husband on the wedding day. Given the context and the fact that the church is the bride of Christ, it seems that this refers to the last day when the church, Christ's bride, will have been completely sanctified, readied, and given to her husband to live with happily for all of eternity. The present course of actions and choices made by Jesus as he gave himself up for the church, were looking forward to a day when beauty, splendor, and glory would be brought into their fullest expression in the lives of his people. Jesus had all this in mind as he lived and laid down his life.

¹¹ 2 Thes 2:13.

The present is always to be informed by the reality of the future. Husbands, keep eternity in mind as you love your wife. Jesus made crucial choices, painful choices, but nevertheless choices that would bring about a better future. Husbands, do not fail to consider eternity in all your present choices. When you make decisions, you must consider what the future consequences of those decisions will be. True love always allows the future to inform the present. True love is living now in such a way that will result in eternal good. True love never settles for a temporary pleasure that will result in future displeasure by God. True love always strives for an eternal joy. True love is future oriented. The husband who loves his wife like Christ loved the church always keeps the future in mind.

Love Leads Toward God's Word

Fourth, a husband who submits to Christ in loving his wife *leads towards God's word*. In verse 26 Paul notes that Christ's love for the church is expressed in his **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**. True love entails a connection with God's word and the cleansing effect it brings.

Jesus himself is the living word of God and no one has more clearly communicated God's word than did Jesus. Jesus labored in teaching God's word and finding creative ways to illustrate its truth. Jesus was a teacher. A significant part of his life mission was to communicate the word of God.

Husbands, if you would love your wife as Jesus loved the church, then there must be a place for you to bring God's word into your married life. Our lives are cleansed as we are washed by the truth found in God's word. When we read God's word, understand it, receive it, and live according to it, then our lives are washed free from the muck we have gotten ourselves into. Husbands, if you want to see the messes in your marriage cleaned up, then you need to make room for God's word to have its effect. If you want to clean up your marriage, then allow God's word to enter into the relationship between you and your wife.

Read God's word together.

Where should you start? Start where Alisa & I did when we started dating. We began reading Proverbs together. Proverbs is filled with pithy truth delivered in bite sized chunks. You can read three or four verses together and have plenty to talk about and strive together to put into practice within your relationship. The relational wisdom contained in that book is incredibly applicable to the marital context. Even if you don't begin in Proverbs, pick a book and read it together or find a time to talk about God's word together so it can have the cleansing effect that God intends his word to have.

The husband who would love his wife like Christ loved the church will make God's word a central part of his marital relationship.

Love Cherishes and Nourishes

Fifth, a husband who submits to Christ in loving his wife will *nourish and cherish* her.

Ephesians 5:28-31 (ESV)

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."

What does it mean to nourish and cherish your wife? These are powerful words. To nourish someone is to abundantly provide for every area of need. To nourish your wife is to cause her to flourish in every arena of need—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Paul explains by inviting the husband to consider how he nourishes and cherishes *his own body*. Husbands should love their wives just like they love their own bodies. **He who loves his wife loves himself.** In marriage, the two become one flesh. Marriage involves the union of two people, emotionally, physically, economically, and legally. Husband, if you want to love your wife like Christ does the church, and treat your wife with the same tenderness, affection, and concern as you do your own body.

If you are called by Jesus to nourish and cherish your wife then you need to stop thinking of her as an *addition* to yourself and start thinking of her as an *extension* of yourself. She's not just "another mouth to feed." She is part of you. Feeding her is the same as feeding yourself. Caring for her is the same as caring for yourself. Ignoring her is the same as ignoring yourself. Harming her is the same as harming yourself. Loving her is loving yourself.

This reminds us of the Old Testament commandment to "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"¹² If God expects his people to love their neighbors, how much more does he expect husbands to nourish, cherish, and love their wives. And besides, for every husband there is no closer neighbor than his wife?

The word **cherish** takes this love husbands are commanded to show their wives to an entirely different and deeper level. Cherish is the opposite of tolerate. To **cherish** a wife is "to care for beyond measure; to adore; to hold dear; to treat with upmost affection." Husbands, does this describe your relationship with your wife? Could your wife say, "Oh yes, that's exactly how my husband treats me."

Husbands, if we are called to love our wives just as much as we love our own bodies, then we need to do some serious thinking. How much attention do you give your own body getting

¹² Lev 19:18.

clothes, food, exercise, grooming, and rest? Do you spend even half that much time thinking about how to nourish and cherish your wife? Maybe the next date night, or lunch today, should include the following two questions:

1. Do you feel cherished by me?
2. In what ways could I nourish you?

The husband who would love his wife like Christ loved the church must nourish and cherish his wife.

Love Leaves and Hold Fast

Finally, the husband who is submitted to Jesus in loving his wife will *leave and hold fast*. In v.31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 which speaks of marriage before any sin was in the world.

Ephesians 5:31 (ESV)

³¹ *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

Husbands who would love their wives like Christ loved the church must *leave* mom and dad *and hold fast* to his wife. First, he must **leave father and mother**. Father and mother provided the context for relational stability, love and emotional nourishment for the son. In the life of the unmarried son, home is the foundational setting for relational connection.

However, when the son marries, his wife, not his father and mother, is to be the grounding of his relational stability. If the new union between husband and wife is to be permanent, then the new home the married couple is building together must be the primary place of emotional and spiritual residence.

There cannot be an option of running back home to mother and father in order to find comfort and stability. Comfort and stability must now be found in his wife. This will be hard, but it is God's design. Husbands who love like Christ must be whole-hearted in devotion to their wives and unwilling to turn back to those who previously supplied emotional support, whether they be mom and dad or former girlfriends. This is why marriage vows include a line to the effect that "forsaking all others I will be faithful to you alone." "Forsaking all others" includes parents and former flames.

In order to fully hold fast to his wife, he must emotionally let go of mother and father. Mothers, when your sons marry let them go to their wives and do not hold fast (i.e. cling) to them. You have a husband to whom you should hold fast. Hold fast (cling) to your husband, not to your son. Set him free to fold fast to his wife, not you. Fathers, the same goes for you, let your

sons establish their own homes with his wives. Do not hold fast to your son. Let him be free to leave and hold fast to his wife.

Because God designed husband and wife to be “one flesh,” husbands must let go of all other affections—real or imagined—and fully hold fast to his wife. He must leave the home in which he grew up and be free to establish a new one with his wife. Wife should be the unrivaled object of all husbandly affections.

Husbands, if you would love your wife like Christ loved the church, then leave mom and dad and hold fast to your wife and never let go of her.

Summary and Conclusion

Paul summarizes this section in verse 32.

Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)

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.

The relationship between husband and wife is not simply the relationship between a male and a female. There is much more going on. God did not only intend for marriage to be the appropriate context for intimacy and companionship and the context into which children are born. He also intended marriage to be a living parable which illustrates Christ's love for the church. God intends marriage to be a living testimony of divine love between God and his people. Paul says this is a profound mystery.

If you would like to rightly portray this mystery to the watching world, then husbands, love your wives as you love yourself. And wives, see to it that you respect your husband. This is not just essential for a happy functional home. It is also essential to rightly reveal God's love to this world.

Husbands, Jesus is calling us to submit to him by loving our wives. Do so by loving her with a self-sacrificing love. Love her by leading towards holiness. Love her by keeping the future in mind. Love her by leading her towards God's word. Love her by nourishing and cherishing her. And finally, love her by leaving all sense of home found apart from her and by holding fast to a sense of home that is found only in her.

Husband, love your wives as Christ loved the church.