

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:21-33

²¹ (submitting) (and be subject) 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.

Over the past few months the Lord has impressed strongly upon my heart that Christian marriage is being attacked by the enemy of our souls, and by the world system that he controls. This awareness has come to be from both near and from afar, from Christian brothers and sisters who are struggling in their marriages here close at home, and even from across the big puddle, back in the land of my birth, Greece.

It has been an awakening to me, but one that was necessary, especially as I find myself in a leadership position in this fellowship, and one that has certainly driven

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me to pray and to examine my own marriage more carefully. So I hope you understand that as I speak regarding Christian marriage, that I am certainly in the same boat as many of you are, struggling and learning, failing and getting up again, and by God's grace I am starting slowly to get it, that the Covenant of Marriage is a beautiful parable of God's Covenant with His people. You will also, I hope forgive me, but my emphasis will be slightly skewed towards the husbands in our midst, being one myself.

You have to also understand that I will be able to touch only on some crucial and foundational aspects of Christian marriage, for this subject is quite large and glorious, and it would literally take days of study to see it from every side, and unpack it fully. I pray that when you go home with your spouse tonight, that you will have a renewed appreciation and understanding of Christian marriage, and that you will seek to see its glory as you take it before the Lord.

The passage we just read is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and vilified passages in all of scripture. Our culture, and indeed every culture the world over, strongly reacts against what they think they perceive here, because their perception is not godly, and they cannot see the glory of the gospel of Christ in these verses. Even in the Church today there are many who would wish that the Apostle Paul would have never penned these words under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

The issue here is what is perceived, as being an unfair, capricious, mean-spirited, antiquated concept of the husband's headship, and of the wife's submission to the husband's headship.

But truth be told, few things are more broken today than true manhood and headship in relation to women and families, and the price of this brokenness is enormous in our culture and touches every facet of life.

So let us start near the end of our passage and work backwards towards the front. In verse 31 we read:

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 (great), and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

First let us look at this word “mystery” and understand that this not something that is strange and perplexing and hidden away, something which is impenetrable for us to understand. In the New Testament a “mystery” is something kept by God close to His heart, but which is now revealed and displayed. This specific mystery referred to here in this verse, is now revealed in the relationship of Christ and His Church.

Christian marriage, as displayed in these few verses, is a metaphor, a picture, a model, a parable that stands for something: the relationship between Christ and His Bride the Church.

So the deepest meaning of marriage is that it is a Living Drama of how Christ and the Church are to relate to one another. This is further confirmed as we read verses 28-30.

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.

So what we see here is a parallel. What Christ does to the Church He does to Himself because we are His Body. So when a husband nourishes and cherishes his wife he does it to himself. And when Christ nourishes and cherishes His Church He nourishes and cherishes Himself.

This parallel between the husband and Christ, and the wife and the Church, is to underline the mystery, which is that marriage in its deepest meaning is a copy of Christ and His Church.

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Perhaps now you will better understand why the enemy of God is bent on destroying marriages, because in so doing he is destroying the showcase, the display, of God's love for His people from the beginning of time, and of Christ's for His Bride into eternity. And I must tell you that in my spirit it rings true, that as the Day of the Lord draws near, the attacks upon marriage will increase, they will mount.

Christian marriage is not an end of itself. This is why marriage does not exist in the resurrection. We are not married in Heaven, but like the angels of God. Copies are not needed anymore when the reality is fully revealed. Marriage is a copy of a greater original, that the world desperately needs to see, and it is displayed and showcased in the marriage of a man and a woman.

Jeffrey Bromley, a Church historian, says this: "As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people."

If this truth, that I do not think we cannot possibly repeat often enough, that is, that marriage is the showcase of Christ's love relationship with His Church; if this truth grabs us, particularly us men, if it lands on us, I scarcely will have to talk to you about application.

I believe that if this truth enters the human heart by the illumination of the Holy Spirit it will change everything by virtue of its shear magnitude and astounding glory.

Suddenly your view of marriage changes and your heart soars with a new sense of what you are on the planet for, and what this woman in her magisterial dignity as your bride at your side is all about, and what you are living here for, and everything changes. I cannot make this happen for you, I wish I could, but God can make it happen, and I pray He makes happen for you and for me.

You might say to me: “Brother George, I need an example or two, give me some application of what I am to do.” Alright, I might do that, but is not your heart exploding with the glory of marriage? Can you understand that if you allow this glory to change you, she will look different, the kids will look different, the planet will look different, life and death, and everything will look different?

It is wonder that changes people, the wonder of God’s truth revealed in His Holy Word, not lists or examples. Seeing Glory changes everything, and if you can see this glory ordained by God, your marriage will change because you will change. Are we getting this? Are you starting to see this beautiful metaphor of God’s love for His people portrayed in covenant marriage?

Now lets look back a few more verses:

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,

First, let the obvious sink in. Husbands are compared here to Christ. Wives are compared to the Church. Husbands are compared to the Head, while wives are compared to the Body. They are compared, but not the same. Husbands are commanded to love like Christ, while wives are commanded to submit as the Church does to Christ.

Now this is obvious to most of us at this point, maybe even all of us, but there are folks out there, even in the Church, who read this and do not see any of it. Some do not believe that manhood by God’s design involves husbands being in a unique role of leadership and headship in the home. These are the egalitarians that are

even in the Church today. They emphasize equality. They cannot believe that there can be a **distinction in roles** in the marriage relationship.

Well let me show you something that has been extremely helpful to me. You will perhaps now understand the reason that I included verse 21 in our text for tonight.

²¹ (submitting) (and be subject) to one another out of reverence for Christ.

In reality the word “be subject” should be translated as “submitting,” and some of your translations likely do that. It is a participle, which is a verb that is used as an adjective, which points back in the text to a verb where the whole thought originates from, and hangs by. So let us find that first verb that got us here to this participle. Look back in your Bible to verse 18.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² The wives to their husbands, as to the Lord.

Do you see the natural flow now, which starts with “be filled with the Spirit.” This is the banner flying over the entire passage all they way down to verse 33. We are to be filled with the Spirit... submitting to one another. This comes first.

So the mark of a marriage relationship filled with the Spirit is mutual submission. Husbands and wives that are filled with the Spirit serve one another. They humble themselves and get down low, and lift the other up.

They find ways to submit their immediate preferences for comfort to the need of the other. This is what Jesus did for His Church on the Cross, He humbled Himself, got low, very low and under, and lifted the Church out of hell!

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The world violently reacts against this truth, and devils tremble.

So verse 21 summons us to mutual submission, then the following 12 verses explain the differences in the relationship. This is easy to see now, but alas, not easy to do. But let me assure you; you do not need to abandon verse 21 when you get to verse 22, or vice versa.

We are to be mutually humble and ready to serve, mutually eager to meet each others needs, and build each other up, and sacrifice for each other, in our marriage. Christ through His sacrifice and His example has changed everything. This Christian message found in these few verses in Ephesians is radical in every culture in its beauty for man and woman, and the world all around us desperately needs to see this beauty and draw near to Christ.

The detractors say that if you are to have mutual submission you cannot have anything that looks like hierarchy. They are mutually contradictory, they say. But this is not true, and perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is by looking to our prime example, Jesus.

Now picture Jesus on the night before He died. One of the things He did is to take off His outer garment, put a towel around His waist, took a basin of water, got on His knees like a slave, and washed the dirty feet of His Bride, His disciples. He submitted to them, got down low, and then lifted them up. And they were absolutely mortified.

Well let me ask a question. At that moment when Jesus was on the ground washing dirty feet like a slave, was there a scintilla of doubt in that room as to who the leader was? Of course there was not. For even that Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

So what is then the problem with saying that mutual submission actually defines leadership rather than nullifies it? Why cannot humility, and love, and sacrifice stamp and prove the meaning of leadership, govern it, control it, rather than kill it?

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So what does leadership and headship look like? Well, in this passage to the Ephesians a crystal clear distinction arises between the role of the husband who is the head, and the role of the wife who submits to, glories in, and partners with the headship of her husband. This is the recovery of Eden.

You see, headship and submission did not originate with the sin and fall of Adam and Eve. What the fall did is corrupt it and ruin it, and turned it into something ugly and horrible in two different directions.

For headship it destroyed the humble, loving headship into either: hostile, domination and abuse, or lazy, indifference with a can of beer and a bag of chips till ten, and then he asks for you know what!

The main problem with men in the Christian culture today is not so much hostile domination and abuse, although unfortunately it exists. Please listen to me men! There are more women in the Church today with broken hearts whose husbands just do not lead; they do not take any initiative. Perhaps they are afraid they can't. But they must. And by God's grace they will.

What the fall did to submission was also one of two things: It took willing, and happy, and creative, and articulate, and intelligent submission and turned it either into a manipulative, groveling, silly caricature of femininity, or to a brazen, stark, uppity, in your face, rejection of headship. You can call the later one rebellion.

But thanks be to God, there is redemption, and in Ephesians 5 these distortions are redeemed, by the man being told to bring his headship into conformity with Christ's way of loving, and leading, and providing, and protecting His Church, and by the wives bringing their submission into conformity to what Christ calls forth from the Church, His Bride.

The recovery of Eden happens when the full understanding of the truth is unveiled in Ephesians 5. This is how it was supposed to be before sin turned men brutal or

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passive, and the women into helpless no-nothings or strong brazen, “get out of my way, I do not need a man in my life,” women.

Thank God there is another way. There is a rescue of something sin destroyed, and it is absolutely beautiful when the lights go on and by the power of the Holy Spirit, it happens.

Let me give you two definitions, borrowed from John Piper, one for headship and one for submission.

“Headship, is the divine calling of the husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home.”

This comes, I believe, right out of our text, and I wish we had more time for us to look at it word by word, for there is beauty in every sentence. This is a call to the husband to be both Lionhearted and Lamb-like, like Jesus who is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God. This is someone who is to be strong yet meek, tough yet tender, bold yet broken-hearted, aggressive yet responsive. And how is the husband to protect his bride, but in a similar way that Christ protected us, by dying for us, by bearing our sins, by protecting us from God’s wrath, by becoming a curse for us? The husband will never be Christ in his headship, but he is to love just “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” He is to be willing to die for his wife in protecting her, and sacrifice everything in providing for her, both physically and spiritually.

Now, “**submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and to help carry it through according to her gifts.**” (which may surpass his in many ways...)

I want to leave you with one last thing that the Lord is making clearer to me, and for this one I must thank my wife Judy who challenged me yesterday, as only she could. This understanding comes out of the two verses that we have not covered thus far (verses 26, and 27).

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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.

I believe that in a very real sense the marriage relationship is to be a conduit of God's grace to each other. On the one hand is the grace that the Lord gives to the husband and to the wife individually. This vertical outpouring of grace is given so that the husband and the wife can bend this grace horizontally out to their spouse in forgiveness, forbearance, and love.

On the other hand, I believe, there is this special grace that the Lord gives the husband as the head of his wife, and this grace, which is not the husband's grace but the Lord's, is sanctifying grace, it is cleansing grace, it is beautifying grace, it is perfecting grace, and the wife is to receive this grace and bend it back in thanksgiving to the Lord who gave it, completing an uninterrupted circle of grace from the Lord, the giver of all grace, to the husband who passes this grace to his wife in a divine metaphor, who becomes the thankful recipient of grace, back to the Lord who receives it as thanksgiving, and joy is released in the marriage relationship.

Metaphor in Greek means transfer. So in receiving this grace from the Lord and passing it on, the husband allows for the transfer of this divine reality and the marriage becomes a picture, an example, a copy of the headship and leadership and love of Christ over His Church, and of the submission of the Church to Christ, and abundant joy is released.

I wish to talk for a moment about this relationship between grace, thanksgiving, and joy. You all know the famous Einsteinian equation $E = mc^2$. Well, there is sort of an equation, much more powerful and beautiful, which operates in marriage, but also in the life of every saint. You see the Greek words for grace, thanksgiving, and joy, are all related. Grace is *charis*, and thanksgiving is *eucharistia*, which simply means "good grace," and joy is *chara*. So when grace is

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outpoured and thanksgiving arises, and is “squared”, that is, it is abundant, then the glorious power or “energy” of joy is released, which brings glory and honor to the Lord. Now please understand that our God is gracious God and he keeps pouring out grace even when we are slow to thank Him for it. But I mention all this because I believe that the covenant of marriage is set up specifically for this “divine equation,” if you will, to operate in it, to the Glory of God.

Now both the husband and the wife can each hinder the flow of grace and thus can obscure the showcase and the display of God’s love for His people, of Christ’s for His Church, and limit joy, by not fully living out their divinely ordained and distinct roles.

In closing husbands, please also hear this: In a very real sense just as Christ is the High Priest for His people, so also you are to be the priest for your family, even though you are frail and weak, and imperfect, unlike Christ who is pure and strong and perfect. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Also please remember this: that if you desire your wife to change, you cannot lord it over her to change, and the only change you may desire, pray for, and encourage through your Lionhearted and Lamb-like headship, is that she should conform to Christ, and be holy in her character, and in her God-given beauty.

And wives, you may desire the same for your husbands, and so do not shy away from bringing the truth and the wisdom that God gives you to him humbly, for you can do it in a way that honors and affirms his leadership, and helps him to carry it through, as you exercise the gifts that God has given you in His grace.

Husbands and wives, lay down your lives for each other, be filled with the Spirit, submitting to one another out of reference for Christ.

Amen.