

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 23

Husbands And Wives

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Ephesians 5:22-33

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:22-33. As you look that text up in your Bibles let me just remind you how we got here. The main verb for this entire section of text through to 6:9 is the verb *pleirousthe* which means “be ever being filled” by the Holy Spirit, you see that in verse 18. Its followed by five supporting participles the last of which is seen in verse 21 which is translated as “submitting to one another”. So Paul is telling this church to be every being filled by the Holy Spirit such that certain things are happening the last of which is that we are submitting to one another in a variety of complicated relational contexts. Now, as I mentioned last week there are some within liberal circles who have desired to understand what Paul is commanding in verse 21 as entirely reciprocal meaning that everyone is submitting to everyone in exactly the same way. Wives are submitting to husbands and husbands are submitting to wives, but that isn’t what “one another” usually means in the Bible and that isn’t what Paul goes on to say. He gives three examples of what he means by submitting to one another and none of them are reciprocal. He tells wives to submit to husbands but he does not tell husbands to submit to wives he tells husbands to love wives. He tells children to obey parents but he does not tell parents to obey children he tells them to instruct children. He tells servants to submit to masters but he does not tell masters to submit to servants he tells them to be fair and kind. So Paul is clearly NOT calling for reciprocal submission. You can’t play silly games with verse 21 and then use it as a magic eraser to get rid of verses 22-24 and yet that is exactly what so many pastors are doing in liberal churches and increasingly in marginally Evangelical churches and it should stop.

At some point we have to just decide if we are under the authority of God's word or not. When we read a text in the Bible that is hard or that rebukes our natural thinking we have two honest choices. Submit to it or reject it. Be a Christian or don't be. Changing the text to suit our opinions is simply not an option – not an honest option. So let us simply read the text and let it say what it clearly and unambiguously says and then we can decide how we wish to respond at the end. Hear then the Word of the Lord:

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so 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. ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because 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.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, as we read through that text it is clear that Paul is making a main point and a parallel point. He is primarily talking about how the Spirit manifests in truly saved Christians. This paragraph continues to spell out the consequences of being ever filled by the Holy Spirit. In the previous paragraph the focus was on the worship of the gathered church. In a Spirit filled church that has gathered for worship you will see this, this and that. Now the focus is on the Spirit filled SCATTERED church. This is what Spirit filled Christians look like when they GO HOME. Now let's just pause there. I find this both fascinating and convicting. There is so much conversation right now on what the Spirit filled church looks like when it is gathered for corporate worship. John MacArthur just let off a bomb in the Evangelical church with his Strange Fire conference which had as its main objective to show that the worship being offered in the extreme factions of the charismatic movement represents “strange fire” – unauthorized worship. Now the charismatics are firing back and everyone has an opinion and so we should – we need to think about this and talk about this and I mean to do that. I'll get the book, I'll read it and we'll do something to equip you to engage that conversation because it does matter. But here is my point. All of that conversation is about the Spirit filled church gathered – this text suggests that the debate might be settled by looking at the church scattered. Instead of dissecting the

worship – if that doesn't settle the issue – let's just go home and look at these folks in their natural environment. Who has a healthy marriage? Whose kids are walking with the Lord? Who has a good reputation in the neighbourhood and in the workplace? What I find fascinating is that for Paul the conversation about being Spirit filled doesn't stop when the music stops or when the benediction is said – the real conversation carries on into the bedroom and the dinner table and the workplace. Someone should write a book about that! The Spirit filled marriage bed, the Spirit filled dinner table and the Spirit filled office cubicle – who will buy that book? Well I don't know who will buy that book but I know that you are going to get those sermons over the next 4 weeks. That is the main point that Paul is working here – how the Spirit filled Christian looks at home in his or her marriage.

The parallel point is how the Spirit filled marriage reveals the mystery of the Gospel. Paul keeps making these side points about how, while all of this counsel is about marriage, it also tells a story about the Gospel. That issue we'll deal with next week. Paul is an inspired genius and he is able to keep all of that together but I'm not and you're not and therefore I think we will need to deal with these things separately or our heads will explode. The main focus for this morning's message is just TWO FOLD. What does it mean for wives to submit to their husbands and what does it mean for husbands to love their wives?

First of all then:

What Does It Mean For Wives To Submit To Their Husbands?

Look at verses 22-24. Paul comes right out and says that wives are to submit to their husbands in everything because the husband is the head of the wife. He just throws that out there as a fact. Before we ask what that looks like let's first ask where this comes from. Where does Paul get this idea of male headship in the home? He doesn't tell us here, here he assumes that the Ephesians are familiar with this teaching but we do have a letter that Paul wrote to the pastor of these same churches and he is more explicit there.

Where Does Paul Ground His Understanding Of Headship?

Turn quickly to 1 Timothy 2:12-15:

¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³**For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.** ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (ESV)

In verses 8-12 Paul talks about the WHAT of headship and then in verse 13-14 he talks about the WHY; he tells us where his teaching comes from. We don't have time for a bunny trail into how headship applies in the church – that's a whole other sermon – suffice to say that he says that women are not to be the doctrinal arbiters or deliverers – we would say elders or preachers in the church. The why is what we're interested in. Look again at verses 13-14:

¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (ESV)

He grounds his argument in the order of creation. This is incredibly important. People will try and tell you that these sorts of arguments in the Bible are rooted in culture – I was told that in seminary – but they're not, they're rooted in creation. Paul doesn't say word one about culture or about the condition of these women. He doesn't tell me whether they were prostitutes or not and he doesn't tell me whether they were educated or not. All he talks about is the order of creation. He argues his point out of Genesis 1-3. That's important because if this was a cultural argument you might be able to dismiss it. But if it is a creation argument – it is harder to think of anything that would suggest a more universal application. That floored me when I finally saw it. You need to know that I am a convert to this teaching not a native. I had to be convinced that this is what the Bible says – I did not think this according to the flesh. But to be a Christian is to tremble at God's Word. I came to believe that this is for God's glory and for my good even though it sounds very strange to modern ears.

In 1 Timothy and in Ephesians we must resist the temptation to alter this teaching by playing word games or by suggesting that this doctrine is culturally located – I know you can hear that in liberal pulpits all across Christendom but it's not true, it is not honest to the text. The Bible says that in the home and in the church men are to exercise a ministry of headship and women are to submit to that. You are free to reject that but you are not free to edit that out of the Bible.

Alright, having seen where Paul got this from we need to go back to the original issue of what this looks like. What does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband in a Spirit filled Christian marriage? Paul tells us in verse 24:

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (ESV)

Paul says basically that what he has already told them about submitting to Christ as a church can serve as a useful guide for wives submitting to their husbands. With that in mind we might suggest that wives submitting to their husbands will involve:

1. Submitting so as to receive
2. Paying attention in anticipation of growth
3. Seeking to please by understanding his will
4. Responding with constant, in everything gratitude and thanksgiving

Let me say just a word or two about each of those. In terms of submitting so as to receive, we take that from 1:22-23 where Paul said:

²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (1:22-23. ESV)

There the submission of the church to Christ is so that they can be filled with the fullness of God. When the church is in alignment under Christ they expect to receive blessing and benefit. So too in a Spirit filled marriage a wife submits to her husband in the belief that it will result in her benefit. God's will is always simultaneously for his glory and our good always. Women, do not obey this commandment begrudgingly as a hard duty unto the Lord. Believe that it will be for your good and God's glory always.

Secondly we take this idea of wives submitting to their husbands AS the church submits to Christ to suggest that it involves paying attention in anticipation of growth. I take that from 2:20-22 which says:

²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22. ESV)

Here Paul is saying that as the church focuses in on Christ she grows up – this is what Paul teaches elsewhere in our much quoted verse from 2 Corinthians 3:18:

¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (NRSV)

As the church under the Lordship of Christ looks at Jesus she is changed. So we might say that in a Spirit filled marriage as the wife looks to her husband – as she identifies and accepts him as her leader and teacher – she will change. She will grow and be transformed.

Thirdly if the wife's submission to her husband is analogous to what Paul has said about the church in submission to Christ then it will involve seeking to please him by understanding his will. In Ephesians 5:10 we read Paul telling the church to:

try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (ESV)

The church in submission to Christ wants to understand why the Lord loves this and hates that, why the Lord is doing this and not doing that so as to respond intuitively to him. The wife in submission to her husband does the same. Those of you who learned ballroom dancing know that one partner leads and the other partner anticipates – this is good dancing and this is good marriage, Paul says.

Lastly, a wife submitting to her husband in this way will be responding with gratitude and thanksgiving. Paul several times says that the characteristic response of the church to her Lord Christ is gratitude and thanksgiving as for example we see in 5:4:

⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:4. ESV)

Crude joking should be absent from the church in submission to Christ whereas thanksgiving should be characteristic. Likewise, the speech of a Spirit-filled wife in submission to her husband ought to resound with thanksgiving and gratitude. I might suggest that for many women this is likely to be the hardest part of the whole process. It seems to me in my ministerial experience, that the default conversational tone for many Christian wives is criticism and discontent. You don't do enough of this, you do too much of that, why can't we have more of this and more of that. That sort of talk is out of place in a Christian marriage. It no more belongs in a Spirit filled marriage than does dirty joking belong in the pulpit of a Spirit filled church. They are equally out of place where the Spirit works and reigns.

Now before we move on to the second part – what husbands loving their wives looks like – let me just anticipate a question. Doesn't this sort of teaching demean women and rob them of dignity? Doesn't submitting imply demotion in value? The Biblical answer is no. Again, remember that Paul is grounding his argument in creation and as we'll see next week in Christology. Jesus Christ submits to the Father within the ordered relationship of the Trinity – that cannot be denied, Jesus says it himself in John 5, but does that therefore mean that Jesus is lesser in value or dignity than the Father? Or for that matter is the Spirit lesser than the Son because the Spirit delights to glorify not himself but the Son? No! Within the Trinity we see functional subordination but equality of worth and dignity – so in marriage which is intended to reflect those greater realities. If the Christian Trinity does not demean Jesus then how does Christian marriage demean women? It does not and it should not. Subordination in role does not imply demotion in value.

What then does it look like for a man to love his wife as Christ loved the church?

What Does It Mean For Husbands To Love Their Wives As Christ Loved The Church?

Look at verses 25-30. Again much of the content comes from this analogous comparison between Christ and the church. In the same way that Christ loved the church even unto death, the husband ought to sacrificially love his wife in that way. Paul provides a paragraph about purpose or intended result and then a paragraph about manner. Let's look at purpose first.

Towards This End....

There are three “so that” or “such that” clauses in verses 26-27. Let me highlight those for you:

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**. (ESV)

First of all then a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church towards the result or end of:

1. Her consecration (v. 26)

I know most of your Bibles translate that as “sanctify her” and that is absolutely correct but most modern readers don’t understand that there are two types of sanctification in the Bible. There is positional sanctification and progressive sanctification and we tend to default in our minds to progressive sanctification when we hear that word and the context indicates that it is positional sanctification being spoken of which is more like our word “consecration”. When Paul says that Jesus sanctified the church, cleansing her by the washing of the word he is talking about how the church was set apart for special relationship to the Lord – he’s not talking here about how she is growing and changing – that comes later. Here Paul is drawing on an Old Testament passage we’ll look at in detail next week. In Ezekiel 16 God talks about his relationship with his covenant people as being analogous to a man who found an aborted baby lying on the side of the road. He takes pity on the baby and sees to her upbringing and care. He bathes her and when she is of marriageable age he dresses her in beautiful raiment. This is what Paul means by “cleansing her by the washing of water”. This imagery was common to the first century Jew because as part of their wedding ceremonies there was a pre-nuptial bath. The bride bathed herself as preparation for her husband. The point is that Jesus elected, saved and cleaned the church to make her a fit companion for himself. The husband who loves his wife this way prepares and positions her to serve and worship the Lord. He is totally invested in her spiritual well being and in her utility to the Lord.

Secondly then a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church towards the result of:

2. Her beautification (v. 27a)

The actual Greek says “in glory” but that has so many Christological undertones that it would be distracting so the ESV rightly translates that as “in splendour” which is synonymous. Jesus doesn’t just save the church and cleanse her from sin he also builds her up into something glorious. So too the husband. A husband’s job is to build up his wife into someone beautiful, glorious and full of splendour. The Spirit filled church speaks words of edification when it gathers for worship and when it goes home as a family, that’s the point being made here.

Thirdly a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church towards the result of:

3. Her maturation (v. 27b)

The third “so that” is:

that she might be holy and without blemish. (ESV)

The husband loves his wife by disciplining her towards moral and spiritual maturity. These are the concerns of Christ as he loves the church and these must be the concerns of a husband as he loves his wife.

In the second paragraph in this section Paul shifts to the manner of a husband’s love for his wife. We see that in verses 28-30:

In This Way...

²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as Christ does the church**, ³⁰because we are members of his body. (ESV)

Again, the way that Christ loves the church is the model for how husbands should love their wives but now the emphasis is not on purpose but on manner. In the same WAY. That way is explained as:

1. Instinctively

2. Tangibly

3. Tenderly

A person does not have to be told to look after their own bodies. We do that by instinct. If you accidentally put your hand on the stove, you don't need to be told to remove it. You do that before any thought is formed – you do that reflexively. Husbands you need to love your wife that way. She needs to be first in your thoughts and first in your concerns. It ought to be clear to everyone who knows you that you think of her first and reflexively in every scenario. When a decision has to be made you're immediately thinking: "What outcome best serves my wife?" I'm not saying to make your wife an idol – your FIRST first thought is "What outcome best serves God's glory" but right after that, under God, your instinctive thought is for the welfare of your wife.

Your love for her also needs to be tangible. Paul says that husbands should nourish their wives using the word *ektrepho* which means "to raise" or "to nourish". It is often used to refer to raising children and implies providing for the needs of dependents. Husbands, this is a command from the Lord to get a job and support your wife. Men tell your sons that a big part of God's will for their lives is that they would grow up, get a job, make money and use it to provide an opportunity for some woman to become the beautiful child of God she was created to be. Tell your son that he's supposed to come home exhausted and dirty so that his wife can be beautiful and pleasing to the Lord. You get dirty so that she can make things beautiful. That's part of how you love a woman and that's part of how you obey the Lord.

Lastly Paul implies that our love for our wives out to be expressed tenderly. The Greek word translated as "cherish" is the word *thalpo* and it comes from the word "to warm". It implies brooding over so as to care and provide – Paul uses it in 1 Thessalonians to describe how a nurse fusses over children. Husbands you are supposed to fuss over your wife and pay eager attention to her needs. You should warm her and make her feel safe and well cared for. She should feel fussed over and so if your wife hasn't told you recently to stop making such a fuss over her, then you, like me are probably sinning outrageously here and you need to repent.

Conclusion:

By way of close I just want you to notice two things about the text as a whole. Notice first where Paul lands this whole argument. He grounds his argument in a quotation from Genesis 2:24. We have it here in verse 31 as:

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

This entire section of text has been a sermon more or less on Genesis 2:24. This is what it means for two to become one. It is a creation work. It is like when the Spirit hovered over the waters and brought forth life. Cosmos out of chaos by the Spirit and Word of God. This is new creation marriage and it is only possible among the Word washed and the Spirit filled. It requires love and respect but when you put those two together you get marriage like it was designed from the first.

Secondly I just want you to notice that in the first section, about wives submitting to their husbands, there is no reason provided as to why this is a reasonable request. Paul provides a model to follow but not an argument to be agreed with. He doesn't say: “You should do this because of x,y and z.” What he does is spend nearly three times as many words describing a husband's love as he spends describing a wife's submission. Three times. There are 40 words describing submission and 115 defining a husband's love. Why? Because the best argument for a wife's submission is a husband's love. Men if you love your wife this way she will be glad to submit to your leadership in the home. Go first. Sacrificially love your wife toward the end of her consecration, beautification and maturation. Pastor her. Invest in her spiritual well being. Do it instinctively, do it tangibly and do it tenderly and see if her resentment doesn't melt clean away. And if it doesn't - do it anyway. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.