

Ephesians God's New Community
New Marriage Relationships!
Ephesians 5:21-33
20th February 2022
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Introduction

"The mountains hardest to climb often afford the most spectacular views."

Why does Ephesians 5:21-33, all about Christian marriage, give us one of the most spectacular views in all of Scripture? Because, after quoting Genesis 2:24, *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh,"* Paul says in v.31, *"This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."*

Paul is revealing to us that when God designed marriage, back in the Garden of Eden, he modelled it after a far greater prior relationship: the relationship between Jesus Christ, the head, and the church, his body. Back in eternity, God invented that greater relationship, that his Son Jesus Christ, would lay down his life for his bride, the Church. And then, after that, in time, God designed the marriage relationship between a man and a woman to be a reflection of that relationship, with the man taking on the role of Jesus Christ, sacrificially loving his wife, and the wife taking on the role of the Church, responding to Christ's love in submission. A Christian marriage, in other words, should reflect the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church!

Marriage is a mountain with a most spectacular view! This morning we're going to spend a few minutes at base camp preparing the ascent, then we'll climb the mountain in two steps, so it's:

- Preparation!
- Christian Wives!
- Christian Husbands !

(1) Preparation!

Why must we prepare the way for climbing Ephesians 5:21-33?

First because the world misunderstands marriage. When the world reads that the husband is the head of the wife, and that the wife must submit to the husband, it thinks that Paul is talking about hierarchy, the husband is up there and the wife is down here; and harsh obedience. I can't repeat the sermon from two weeks ago, but Paul is talking about order, not hierarchy. Husband and wife are equal in value and equal in salvation, but there is an order between them, just as there is an order between God the Father and God the Son. And Paul is talking about willing and loving submission, not harsh obedience.

But I would go further and say that the world not only misunderstands Paul, it opposes him. Many people today believe that there should be no specific roles for husbands and no specific roles for husbands and wives. But Paul says “Wives, here is your role” and “Husbands here is your role.” “And why is Paul only talking about heterosexual marriage?” More opposition from the world.

And it’s not only unbelievers who misunderstand these verses, Christians can also get their wires crossed here. Let’s clear our minds for the ascent with five statements or observations.

(1) Husbands and wives are to focus on their own responsibility

Paul is very careful about this, look verse 22 “Wives”, verse 25, “husbands,” If he was in this room now, he would gather all the Christian wives on one side of the room and speak to them, “Wives, let me tell you what your responsibility is. Wives, submit to your husbands... Husbands you can listen in, but I’m not talking to you.” And then he’d say, “Christian husbands, come to this side of the room and let me tell you what your responsibility is, “Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church.... Wives, you can listen in, but I am not talking to you.”

Paul is doing something very important. He is telling wives, “Don’t bother yourself with your husband’s role, just focus on your own responsibility.” He is telling husbands “Don’t concentrate on your wife’s role, just concern yourself with your own responsibility.” Some of the biggest problems in marriage occur when each partner focusses on the failures of their spouse: a wife says “the real problem is that my husband doesn’t love me” or the husband says “the real problem in our marriage is that my wife doesn't submit or respect me.” Paul is saying to husbands and wives, “Pay attention to your own role, your own responsibility.” And when each half pays attention to their own responsibility, it makes it easier for the other to fulfil their own God-given roles. When a wife is respectful and submissive, it is easier for her husband to love her; and when a husband lives his wife sacrificially, it is easier for her to be submissive to him.

(2) Husbands and wives are to remember verse 21

A second statement to prepare us for the ascent is to remember that verse 21 comes before verses 22-33: *“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”*

Suppose a Christian husband and wife are in total disagreement over some issue. Does verse 22, “Wives submit to your husband” mean that the wife must give in every time without any kind of discussion? Just submit? Is verse 22 a bully’s charter or a dictator’s mandate? Not at all! If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, says Paul, husbands and wives will be submissive to one another.

I’ll never forget asking an elderly Christian man who had been married for decades. I asked him, over Sunday lunch, if there had ever been an occasion when he had to lead the family, against the advice of his wife and say “This is the decision we are making.” And he racked his memory for quite a while—which was telling in itself - and said there was only one occasion he could think of. In every other situation, the couple had talked back and forth and come to an agreement, but on one occasion they were on holiday in France and one of the children had broken a leg, if memory serves me right. His wife wanted to stay in the country and get all the treatment there, but the husband felt that they

should go back as soon as possible. Only once in what 30,40,50 years!

(3) Husbands and wives are to model themselves on Christ and the Church

Christian wives are to ponder deeply how the church should respond to Jesus Christ in loving submission and honour, verse 24. And they should seek to model their behaviour on the church's proper behaviour. And Christian husbands, you are to make the love of Jesus for his people, your life-long research, verse 25, and you should then model your behaviour towards your wife, on Christ's love for his people.

And do you know who's got the harder task? Someone once joked that Paul has set the bar pretty low for Christian wives, because the church often fails in her duty to submit to Christ! But Jesus Christ, has never failed in his sacrificial, patient love for his people, the church. There is no question that Christian husbands are given the most difficult task! And perhaps that's why we should observe, fourth place:

(4) Husbands are talked to 70%, wives only 30%

...70% of the space (8.5 verse if you want the count!) are addressed to the men and only 30% (3.5 verses) are spoken to Christian wives! Why this enormous difference? Because the task of husband is harder than that of the wife? Or because men fail more often? Or because men are what shall we say, a little slow-off-the-mark when it comes to their responsibilities?

(5) You must work it out!

And finally, you must work it out for yourselves. Have you noticed that Paul says nothing about valentine's day or flowers or date nights!? No mention of chocolates or Eros. No specific details—just big principles! Why is that? Because he assumes that Christians will think deeply about every aspect of their Christian lives, he assumes that Christian husbands and wives will spend time working out all the practical details in conversation and communication with one another.

Some years ago Yvonne and I went to Care for the Family Marriage Seminar. Rob Parsons began by flattering all the couples who attended, saying that we belonged to a very rare and select portion of the general population! Why? Because we had taken out one evening of our time to think about their marriage! Most people just bumble and meander along in life, he said, without ever pausing to think, to ponder, to talk, to learn, to work out their marriage relationship.

Perhaps that is the one thing God wants to lay on someone heart today. If your marriage is in difficulty, is it time to start opening your Bible, seeking the Lord, praying about it, talking about it, learning?

#2 Christian Wives—submit (follow his lead)

Christian wives are you ready? A few words to you, and then a lot more words to your husbands! Christian wives, you must remember, constantly in your mind, this doctrine: that your husband is your head. He's not more important than you, he's not above you, there is no hierarchy, but he is

your head, just as Jesus is the head of the church, verses 22-24. Paul homes in on a common weakness in wives, they so easily forget that God has appointed their husbands as the head. “Let him lead, follow his lead” says Paul.

One woman who was preparing for marriage said to me that the biggest challenge she was facing was that because she was a leader in her work life, making decisions every day, she knew that one of her biggest challenges was going to be remembering that he was her head, standing back and allowing him to lead.

Christian wives, you must remind yourself that your husband is your head, just as Jesus is the head of the church, and you are to follow his lead, as part of your obedience to Jesus, “as to the Lord.” I have a book at home with the title, “wanting to follow, forced to lead”, written by a Christian wife who laments the failure of her husband to lead. But I wonder if another one could be written “Wanting to lead but forced to follow?” Christians wives you have to work it out.

“What about me?” asks a Christian wife who is married to an unbeliever. You too must respect and submit, according to 1 Peter 3:1-14.

#3 Christian Husbands – love

Christian husbands, if the word your wives have to grasp is submit, the word we have to master is love. You must love your wife as Jesus loved the church, verses 25-27. The key word is “gave himself up for the church.” Jesus loved his bride with a sacrificial love.

The Son of God dwelt among the angels of heaven in regal splendour, he was worshipped by archangels, but because he loved his bride, “he gave himself up” and came into this world of sorrow.

*I love to hear the story
which angel voices tell,
how once the King of Glory
came down on earth to dwell.
I am both weak and sinful,
but this I surely know,
the Lord came down to save me,
because He loved me so.*

And once in this world, he, “gave himself up for the church” again, but this time to the shame and pain and horror of a Roman crucifixion, so that his bride might be forgiven and cleansed of all her sin. And in the same way, Christian husbands are to “give themselves up for their wives.”

I remember the mother of a son who was engaged to be married lamenting to me “he is far too selfish to get married.” Isn’t that the problem so often with Christian men? They think only of themselves? Brothers work it out. What does it mean to love your wife sacrificially? To give up something for her

sake? Paul gives men a practical example of what loving our wives looks like in verses 28-29.

You see, if women easily forget that they have a head, to whom they ought to submit, men lose sight of the fact that they have a body, who they should care for. Think says Paul, to the men, about how you look after your own body. When it is hungry, you feed it. When it is thirsty you give it drink. When it is tired you give it a nap. When it is cold you clothe it. Well that is exactly how husband-heads should be thinking about wife-bodies. What does your wife need today? That's how you are to think. You work it out!

Paul gives a wonderful motive to Christian husbands: if you love your wife sacrificially, you will get back a beautiful woman in return, verses 25-27. If you love your wife sacrificially, she will flourish and you will get back a beautiful wife!

Have you ever wondered what Jesus Christ, died, risen ascended, reigning, is doing at this very moment in heaven? Through his powerful word, the Bible, preached in every Christian assembly around the world, he is perfecting his bride, making her holy, sanctifying her, so that he will have a beautiful bride at the marriage supper of the Lamb. A husband's sacrificial love not only benefits his wife, it actually returns to benefit him!

Summary and Gospel Witness

Brothers and sisters you have to work all these things out! Verse 33 is the summary. Can I put it all this way? When unbelievers come into the home of a Christian couple, they should see the Gospel before they hear it. They see a husband loving his wife, even though she does not always deserve it, as Jesus loves his bride, the church. And they see the wife responding to her husband's love in willing submission. Oh that our marriages would speak the Good News more and more! Husbands loving their wives as Jesus loves us, and wives responding in loving submission, and all for the glory of God.