

“Marriage: Husbands & Wives”

Ephesians 5:22-33

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Madison, Wisconsin
April 12, 2009



Introduction:

Probably all of us who are married would agree that marriage is complicated, and perhaps the longer we are married the more complicated it gets. And unfortunately, no one truly understands how complicated it really is until after we are actually married! And there is no way to accurately communicate this to the next generation! Many years ago, a young man asked Aristotle whether he would recommend marriage, and Aristotle responded by saying, **“Yes, if a man gets a good wife he will be very happy, and if he gets a bad wife then he will become a philosopher, and the world needs more philosophers.”** Or to put it in terms we can understand in modern times, as Rodney Dangerfield once said, **“My wife and I were happy for twenty years. Then we met.”** Or, as George Burns once said, **“I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury.”**

I recently read about a 50th anniversary party that was thrown for an elderly couple. The husband was moved by the occasion, he wanted to tell her how much he thought of her, so he got up in front of everyone who had come together, and he very lovingly said, **“My dear wife, after 50 years I have found you tried and true.”** His wife was hard of hearing and asked him to repeat it, **“After 50 years I have found you tried and true.”** The wife was visibly upset and shouted back, **“Well, let me tell you something: After 50 years I am tired of you, too!”** Marriage, therefore, can be rather complicated—even after many years of being together! And again, unfortunately, many people do not really understand how complicated marriage is until it is too late.

As Christians, our guide, our creed, our marriage manual, is the word of God. Two weeks ago, we discovered from **Genesis 2** that God designed and created the marriage relationship. We discovered from the word of God that marriage requires a separation—a separation of a man from his parents, because at that point a new family unit is created. We discovered that marriage involves a permanent union—just as two pieces of paper are glued together; the bond is permanent and cannot be separated without doing damage to both the husband and the wife. And finally, we discovered that marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. This morning I would like for us to continue thinking about the marriage relationship, and I would invite you to turn with me this time to a passage from the New Testament—a passage written by the apostle Paul in the New Testament book of **Ephesians**—**Ephesians 5**. **▶PPT▶** In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1833**.

This passage is extremely practical, and yet at the same time it is also quite difficult to hear. It has been misapplied in many ways over the past 2,000 years, it may be difficult, and yet it is the word of God, and so we need to look at it, we need to understand it, we need to live by it.

One comfort for both men and women as we read this difficult passage is a statement made by the apostle John in **1 John 5:3**, ***“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”*** And so whatever we are about to read, we know that it will not be burdensome. If you will, then, please look with me at **Ephesians 5:22-33**...

- ²² ***Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.***
- ²³ ***For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.***
- ²⁴ ***But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.***
- ²⁵ ***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,***
- ²⁶ ***so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,***
- ²⁷ ***that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***
- ²⁸ ***So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;***
- ²⁹ ***for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,***
- ³⁰ ***because we are members of His body.***
- ³¹ ***FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.***
- ³² ***This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.***
- ³³ ***Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.***

Back in 1999, researchers at Syracuse University interviewed a large number of married couples and asked them the question: What do you want in your marriage? Among the husbands, the number one response was that they wanted respect from their wives. Guess what the wives wanted? The number one response from the women was that they wanted affection from their husbands. Love and respect—as I see it, these are the two things that Paul addresses in **Ephesians 5**. This morning, then, we will follow Paul’s lead, and we will start with the ladies.

I. **The first thing Paul does here is to ENCOURAGE THE WIVES TO RESPECT AND SUBMIT TO THEIR HUSBANDS.** »PPT»

Certainly as we look at the world around us we find that there are two extremes on this issue. On one hand we have the radical feminist movement which seems to be based on the hatred of men and all things male. And then on the other hand there is the radical macho-man idea where men treat their wives as slaves—they are property to be owned and abused. And so as we look at these verses through 21st Century glasses, our first reaction might be to say, **“Wait a minute—that can’t be right!”** We look at this, and we obviously have some **“issues.”** In our society, because this passage has been used by some men to subjugate and abuse women, we go into it with some baggage. And on the other end, there is baggage as well. We may think to ourselves, **“With what is being said by some women these days, there is no way for us to apply these verses here in Madison, Wisconsin.”**

If you still have your Bibles open, I want to point out something that really helps in understanding this whole passage. Please remember that we started in **verse 22**. In most Bibles, the paragraph seems to start in **verse 22**—there is a gap between **verses 21 and 22**—you may even have some kind of man-made heading between these two paragraphs. I say **“man made”** for a reason—the heading between these verses was probably put there by a man. However, **verse 21** is absolutely essential to understanding everything that we have just read. I say this because in the original manuscripts the word **“submit”** is not found in **verse 22**. In the NASB, for example, the word **“submit”** in **verse 22** is in italics. That means that the word is not there, but it is implied by the context. So let’s look back at **verse 21** and move over into **verse 22**, leaving out the word **“submit.”** Paul says (starting in **verse 21**), ***“...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”*** The section actually starts, then, with Paul telling us to be subject to one another. There is to be harmony, and unity, and a kind of give-and-take in our relationship. We do have different roles to play, but neither husbands nor wives are to go into the relationship demanding obedience or submission from the other person. Paul, then, is not addressing a power struggle. This is not a case of slave versus master.

Now, when we get to **verse 22**, Paul does apply the submission directly to the wife, but let us just remember how we got here. The wives, therefore (in this context), are specifically encouraged to submit to their husbands. The word **“submit”** comes from two different words meaning, **“to arrange under,”** and the idea is that a person will arrange himself under another person so that a mission is accomplished. The word was often used in the Roman military, as soldiers arranged themselves under their commanding officers. It did not mean that the person of higher rank was a better person. It did not mean that the person of higher rank was any smarter or any more qualified, but for the sake of the mission as a whole, soldiers would arrange themselves under those of higher rank for the purpose of order and efficiency. The individual gave up his individual rights to protect and strengthen the entire Roman army. They moved together as one man, because they were so good at arranging themselves under the authority of the next person up the chain of command.

Outside the military, the word referred to, **“a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”** It means that a person will willingly respond or yield to another person for the purpose of unity. And so the word refers basically to cooperating or working together.

I should point out, however, that Paul does not use the word **“obey”** in this passage. He could have taken this opportunity to tell wives to obey their husbands. In fact, he uses the word **“obey”** later in this section—two times—once in **Ephesians 6:1** as he tells children to **“obey”** their parents, and once in **Ephesians 6:5** as he tells slaves to be **“obedient”** to their masters. But the word here referring to wives is different. Perhaps this is a rather small point, but the relationship between husbands and wives is definitely different than the relationship between parents and children and slaves and masters—this is not what we are talking about!

Some people look at these verses and they have the idea that the husband is to make all of the **“big”** decisions and the wife gets to make all of the **“small”** decisions. I am reminded of one husband and wife on their 50th wedding anniversary who discussed the secret of their long marriage—the husband said, **“When we got married, I told my wife that I would be making all of the big decisions, and that she could make all of the small decisions, and in fifty years of marriage I have not yet had to make a single big decision!”** That kind of attitude, however, is asking for trouble. God did not put a woman in your life so that you could ignore her input. Submission means that decisions are to be made together and that those decisions are to be made for unselfish reasons.

Somebody might say, **“Yes, but Paul also says that the husband serves as the ‘head’ of his wife.”** It is interesting to me that Paul had two options with the word **“head.”** He could have used the word for boss—the idea of being in a position of great power. But Paul used the other word—a word that was used to describe the guy who personally leads the troops through the jungle—the man with the machete, blazing the trail—not the guy over at headquarters somewhere who gave the command, but the man actually leading the way—the man who takes the lead and goes first—the husband who takes the flashlight and checks out the noise in the basement at three o’clock in the morning—he blazes the trail down those basement stairs. It is not about being in charge, it is about taking the lead. And in this context, Paul tells wives to follow the headship (or the leadership) of their husbands.

Now certainly we can think of all kinds of exceptions. In fact, in your mind you are probably running circles around me right now, **“What if the husband is an alcoholic? What if the husband is abusive? What if the husband is not a Christian? What if the husband is incompetent? What if the husband is a jerk?”** But let us not get bogged down with the exceptions—the word of God teaches that wives are to submit to their husbands. We will get to the husbands in a minute.

Something that may help here is to notice that submitting to a husband is directly tied to submitting to the Lord. In **verse 21**, wives are told that we are to be **“...subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”** In **verse 22**, wives are to be subject to their own husbands, **“...as to the Lord.”** And in **verse 24**, Paul says

that, “...*as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*” In all three cases, the voluntary subjection is based on being subject *to the Lord*. In other words, she does not subject herself because her husband is perfect, not because he is a perfect leader, but she does it for the Lord’s sake—she does it out of respect for God. It all goes back to what we learned weeks ago, where we found that the woman was created to be a “*helper suitable*” for the man. She was not to be in charge, but at the same time she was not to be a slave—she was not just another animal—like an ox that would carry a load, but she was created to be a loyal helper, someone who could work together with her husband.

And while we are on the subject of submission, I should also point out that nowhere in the entire New Testament are husbands ever told to make their wives submissive. Even in this passage, the command to submit is given to the wives. The husbands are never commanded to force their wives to accept this position. But as it is, Paul tells wives to respect and submit to their husbands. From a practical point of view, wives can certainly pray for their husbands every day, wives can tell their husbands what they appreciate about them, wives can be careful not to criticize their husbands in front of others (especially in front of the children), wives can look on the positive side of things he does that they might find irritating, and certainly she can avoid going behind his back and doing those things that she knows he would disapprove. First of all, then (according to the apostle Paul), wives are to respect and submit to their husbands.

II. And now we get to the husbands—if wives are told to submit, we might expect Paul to tell the husbands to lead, and yet he never does. Instead, we find in three different verses that HUSBANDS ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE THEIR WIVES. »PPT»

Certainly, leadership is not excluded here, but the overriding message of **Ephesians 5** for husbands is that we are to love our wives. The message comes through in **verses 25, 28, and 33**. Now in English, we use the same word when we refer to loving spaghetti, loving our dog, loving the color green, or loving our wives. The Greek language, however, is very descriptive, and (from what I understand) Paul had several words for “*love*” that he could have used here. First of all, he could have used the word for friendly or brotherly love—the basis of the word “**Philadelphia**,” the “**City of Brotherly Love**.” He could have used the word EROS, the word referring to erotic love. He could have used the word for family love—the kind of word that describes the natural love between a parent and a child. But instead of using these far more common words, the apostle Paul uses the word AGAPE. It was rarely used in ancient Greek literature, but it refers to the kind of love that looks out and acts on the well-being of another person. It represents a decision to do what is best for someone else—expecting nothing in return. And to illustrate the kind of love that husbands are to have for their wives, Paul gives the example of Christ and the church—in **verse 25**, “...*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” And so he gives an example. The husband is to give himself up for his wife. It is the same word used in **John 3:16** when Jesus said, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him*

shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The word refers to making a sacrifice, just as Jesus ***“gave Himself up”*** for the church.

In the news this past week, we heard this exact phrase being used. On Thursday, the headline on Foxnews.com was, **“FBI hostage team assisting in efforts with Somali pirates holding American Captain Richard Phillips, who gave himself up to free hijacked vessel.”** Obviously this is an ongoing situation, and we will learn more in the coming days and weeks, but sources said that Phillips **“surrendered himself”** to the pirates to secure the safety of his crew. He ***“gave himself up”*** for the crew, the exact phrase that Paul used of Christ (and of husbands) in **verse 25!**

Here is a thought question: Husbands, when was the last time that we made a sacrifice for our wives? And a sacrifice is not just something that WE think is a sacrifice—When was the last time that we did something that SHE recognized as a sacrifice? In other words, listening to her only during the commercials might be a **“sacrifice”** for us, but not necessarily a **“sacrifice”** for her. It is easy to say that we might be willing to die for another person, but imagine this, **“Honey, I would step in front of a bullet for you. But cleaning the kitchen floor—ooooo, I don’t know about that...,”** or, **“Dear, I would pull you out of a burning building. But have the in-laws come and stay here for a week—oooo, I don’t think so.”** Dying in a blaze of glory is not necessarily what the apostle Paul had in mind, but we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church—we are to love them sacrificially.

We think about Christ and the church: How did Christ get the church to submit? Did he force us into it? Did he twist our arms into obeying the gospel? No, but Christ humbled Himself, He took on the form of a servant, He poured Himself out into human form, He offered Himself on the cross, and He washed the church by the washing of water with the word of God. Just this past week, it has been suggested by one of the wise and senior ladies of this congregation: **No woman would have any trouble submitting herself to a man who loved her just as Christ loved the church!** I hope we can appreciate that statement. Think about the crew of the Maersk Alabama—if it all goes well—do you think those men will ever have a problem submitting to their captain?

On another point: Two times in this passage, Paul emphasizes that husbands are to love their **“own wives”**—not their neighbor’s wives, but their **“own wives.”** On the way home from my grandfather’s funeral several weeks ago, we stopped in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, for worship and worshipped at brother Walt’s home congregation. The preacher down there had some very wise words that morning. He said that when you go next door to ask for some sugar, it had better be granulated! Very interesting! Husbands are to love their **“own wives.”**

Connected with this love that husbands are to show for their wives, Paul tells us in **verse 29** that we are to **“nourish”** our wives. That is, we are to care for them, and protect them, and provide for them—we are to feed them and help them grow. We are to **“cherish”** them. As I understand it, the word **“cherish”** refers to warming

them—we are to keep them warm. We are to treat them with warmth and tenderness.

It is interesting to me that men have to be told this. A lot of times, when something is commanded in the Bible, it means that the people who read it for the first time had a problem in that area. Perhaps the men in the city of Ephesus, then, were like a lot of men today in that we sometimes need reminders to treat our wives with AGAPE love. This past week I read some of the advantages of being a man:

- Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat.
- Three pairs of shoes are way more than enough.
- You can quietly watch a game with your buddy for hours without thinking, **“He must be mad at me.”**
- If another buddy shows up at the party in the same outfit, you might just become life-long friends.
- You are not expected to know the names of more than five colors.
- The same hairstyle lasts for years, maybe decades.

These are some benefits; however, Paul says that the man-part of us needs to be told to remember to show affection and to care for our wives. Sometimes as husbands we might be tempted to say, **“I cut the grass, I pay the bills, I fix the car—what else could you possibly want?”** However, if we as husbands can be replaced by a lawn service, an accountant, and a good mechanic, then we are probably not following God’s plan for marriage!

If we are in that category, the Bible tells us what to do. Remember, Paul was addressing the church in Ephesus. Interestingly, the church in Ephesus would have a love problem itself several years later. In the book of Revelation, Jesus delivers a message to the Ephesian church. He praises a number of good qualities, but then He says in **Revelation 2:4-5**, ***“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”*** Just like the love we show for God, if we have lost that first love with our wives, the Bible says that we can repent; that is, we can turn around—we can go back and do the deeds we did at first, we can treat her like we treated her when we were dating, and we can make a decision to change. We can put our relationship with our spouse back at the top of our priority list. We can do things that we may not enjoy doing. Earlier this week I read about a man who ended up going shopping with his wife. They were shopping for a blouse, and the man said, **“I was not shopping for a blouse, I was hunting for a blouse! I wanted to track it, shoot it, bag it, throw it in the back of the truck and go home.”** Whatever it takes, I guess!

On our very first date, I did something that I had grown up hating. Playing cards was from the Devil! But on our first date we went to Wal-Mart down in Tennessee, we bought a pack of Skip-Bo cards, and then we went to Hardees, and we played Skip-Bo for more than six hours! Even looking back on that, I can’t believe I did it! But when we look at our relationship in light of AGAPE love, we can sacrifice, and we go

back and make those sacrifices that we did when we were dating. I think I may see a game of Skip-Bo in my future this week.

Certainly Paul could have told us as husbands to do any number of things—among other things, he could have told us to lead, but the focus in this passage is on **“love”**—three times we are told to **“love”** our wives. Even if she refuses to submit, even if she refuses to show respect, Paul would encourage us to make the decision to love and sacrificially live for her just as Jesus did for the church. It may feel like death, but it is what we have been commanded to do. We can go back and we can do the things we did at the beginning.

Conclusion:

As we close, I would say that the very last verse gives us a pretty good summary of the whole passage, as Paul says, **“Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”** We have a few people here this morning who are not yet married. For the women, know before getting into it that marriage involves a lifetime of submission to one man. And for the men, know before getting into it that marriage involves a lifetime of sacrifice—sacrificially loving one woman just as Christ loves the church.

As Paul says in **verse 32**, **“This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”** The real relationship here is the relationship between Jesus and His people. The Lord demonstrated His perfect love by dying in our place. We respond to that love with submission and respect. We turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried in water so that our sins can be forgiven, and we live the Christian life.

If you need the prayers of this congregation, we hope you will let us know, and we can go to God in prayer together. But if you are not yet a Christian, the Lord is proposing to you through the gospel. If you would like to respond to that invitation right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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