



Ephesians 5:22-33
Christian Marriage Pt2

God has called men to serve as leaders in the home, in the church, and in the community. They have been given a great opportunity, but it's not for their indulgence. Christian men, as we see here in Ephesians five and six, should love their wives sacrificially, their children patiently, and their employees fairly.

People should thrive under their leadership. The lives of their wives, children, neighbors and employees should be markedly, tangibly, better because they are subordinate to a Christian man who is himself subordinate to Christ.

If you go back and search the pages of history, or if you travel around the world today, you find men in positions of leadership who use their privilege for their own benefit, or who abandon the challenges and effort required by leadership in order to lounge and be lazy. When Paul wrote Ephesians, he wrote to a city steeped in the Roman culture of the paterfamilias – the male head of the home.

Calling men to leadership was nothing new, calling them to acts of love and service was revolutionary. Look with me at how the Bible goes about “empowering” men:

Eph 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. **24** Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. **28** So husbands ought to love their own 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 the Lord *does* the church. **30** For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. **31** *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* **32** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

The instruction seems rather plain and easy to understand: husbands love your wives, wives submit and respect your husbands. It's the kind of thing that sounds good in theory. If you could only do it in a laboratory setting where you could tightly control all the variables and factors the idea sounds like it would work. But out here in the real world, with our daily lives, and our personal histories and circumstances and hang-ups it sounds

kind of trite almost and the idea of submission is even offensive to some and misused by others.

So what are we to do? How are we to close the distance between what God commands and what we experience? Well, I want to start this morning by pointing out something that could easily escape our attention. You see, when you read this passage, you find 25 references to husbands and wives, but you also find 27 references to Christ and the church. So, if we want to understand marriage, we have to understand this other relationship first.

Wives are told to submit to their husbands as to the Lord; and, because the church is subject to Christ, ladies should be subject to their husbands. But now the same reasoning is used to explain how husbands should treat their submissive wives: they should love them as Christ loved the church.

What does that mean? Well, let's first establish what it does not mean. It does not mean men are called to sanctify their wives, or that it's their job to cleanse her, to remove her spots and wrinkles and blemishes. That's Christ's role, not the man's. He may use a husband to do some things that enable the work, but it's His work, it doesn't fall to the man to cleanse his bride.

This is important to understand, because you have to know that this passage is not saying men are inherently more spiritual than women, as though only men are capable of sanctifying their spouses, of helping them grow in holiness, as if the only way for her to grow spiritually is for you to lead the way. I think we all know of plenty of relationships where the wife is more mature spiritually than the husband. And we saw last week that Peter was encouraging wives to be submissive and supporting even if their husbands were not saved, because it may be that the woman's actions will win the husband to Christ.

What we should take away from this an understanding of the length that Christ has gone to show love, and the purpose behind His actions. It's meant to overwhelm us in understanding what we have received, and then to compel us to action in response. You can't show this kind of love if you don't understand it, but if you understand it, how can you help but show it?

So in order to understand how you're supposed to love your wife, first you have to understand what God has done for you. You have to know that you are part of the church, and Christ loved you and gave Himself for you – you have to know that first.

Men, that is an essential piece of information. If you have an engineering or program management mindset, if you like fixing things or figuring things out, and most men do, you need to know that this is critical – you can't understand how to love your wife unless you understand how God loves you.

There's a decoder ring here. There's a set of prior instructions. All the pieces you're trying to fit together in marriage won't make sense until you look at the relationship between Christ and the church. In the Old Testament we see God referred to as Israel's husband. In

fact, the prophets accuse the nation of adultery when Israel tries to make treaties with other nations or when the people worship other gods. The book of Hosea is all about God calling His adulterous wife Israel back to himself.

In the New Testament the imagery shifts to Christ as the husband and the church as the bride. He told the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before He was crucified, "I go and prepare a place for you," like any good husband – preparing a home for His bride.

Christians throughout the ages have looked forward to what the book of Revelation describes as 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' when Christ and the church are finally together in Heaven. If you have been born-again, you are essentially engaged to Christ and you're waiting for the day when He actually brings you into His home to live forever.

All of this shapes our understanding of Christian marriage. There are intentional parallels between our relationship with God and our relationship with our spouse. Before women can submit to their husbands, they need to understand what it means to submit to God. And before men can love their wives, they need to know that they are loved by God.

Men, you need to know, you are loved. You need to know that Jesus Christ [gave Himself for you](#). You need to know that He has sanctified and cleansed you, sees you as glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that He has made you holy and without blemish.

Let me explain that a little bit, because sanctified is a Bible word. We don't use it much in our ordinary conversations. It means to be set apart, cleansed and purified for another use.

You might have sanctified dishes at home – things you only bring out for special occasions, for holidays or when guests come. We used to have sanctified soap. Soap shaped like seashells or something, it was decorative and pretty, and your mom would set it right there next to the sink and tell you not to use it, because it was for guests. It was special. It was sanctified, set apart; it wasn't ordinary. Your dad had sanctified tools, things you couldn't touch without asking, because they were his and they were special.

The Bible says part of salvation is being sanctified – being set aside as special by God who has given you a new purpose in life. We read earlier in Ephesians that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10). He has a plan for us. And whether you are a teenaged boy, young man, middle-aged, or retiree, you are God's workmanship, as long as you are breathing, He has good things for you to do, and He went to great lengths to acquire you.

You see that process of setting us apart, the process of sanctifying us, involved tremendous effort on His part, because He demands holiness from us, and in our natural state we're not holy, we're sinful. That's why God sent Jesus to earth – to suffer the punishment we deserve for sin. That's what the cross is all about – Jesus suffering for us. Our sin is like a crime against God, it's like a child's rebellion against their parents. Crime and rebellion have to be confronted, you can't let them go unchecked or things will fall apart. Well, when

we sin, when we do what we want instead of what God has commanded, we break God's laws, we rebel against Him. And as a result we deserve punishment.

But here's the deal – our sin is so abundant in little ways and big, so flagrant at times, that we face the equivalent of a death sentence in the spiritual court system, or a grounding for life for our childish rebellion. We were trapped by consequences too steep for us to endure. And so God took action on our behalf – He took on the flesh of humanity and came down to earth to help us and took on all the punishment Himself. Justice was done because the crimes were punished, but mercy was shown because it wasn't us that paid for them.

And that means we can stand before God as though we are completely innocent. We have been washed clean – we're free of imperfections in His eyes, free of wrinkles, spots, or blemishes of any kind – we're a work of the master craftsman. We're holy in His sight.

And now He nourishes and cherishes us because we belong to Him. Men, this is what Scripture says, and you have to know this. You have to know it when you're single, before you ever get married, and you have to remember it every day of your marriage. You have to remember that you are loved by God. You have to remember that you are accepted and desired, and that He has a plan for your life.

You have to know this *so that* you can fight all the other temptations that are going to pull you away from God, seducing you away from your spiritual husband as well as your earthly wife.

Do you realize that everything that leads you away from your wife also leads you away from God? In fact, do you realize that your heart always wanders away from Him before it wanders away from her? That's why it's so important for you to know you are loved *before* you set out to love.

So, what kind of things am I talking about? What things lure men away from loving God and loving their wives? Let me just talk about two this morning: work and weakness.

Work is the worst of temptations because it seems so justifiable. It doesn't matter if you're in ministry, management, or manual labor – men find it easy to chase their identity and satisfaction at work. It's probably a bit worse of a temptation here in our area because we all feel like our work is so important; our projects are so essential or have such an impact on the nation, or this assignment will have such an important impact on your career.

And so it's easy to get sucked in and work the longer hours, after all, you don't want to be the first one leaving the office. Not long ago someone even coined the term work family or work spouse, because after all, we spend more time with our co-workers than we do with our family.

Men, I'm not calling you fix it, because I don't know if it can be fixed entirely, but I am calling you to fight it; to see the enemy and call it an enemy, a threat to your family. And to

take steps to protect your family, because you know that whatever else happens, God loves you. And I know that can sound so trite, but it's really true.

We're told to pray, (Matt 6:11) "Give us this day our daily bread," but do you really make that connection? Do you see God as your provider? We're told (Col 3:23) to **do all we do as unto the Lord**. But do we do that? Do we see any connection between our work and our Master? We're told that (Ps 75:7) promotion comes from the Lord. But do we believe that? Or do we plot and scheme and strategize about how we're going to get ahead?

Men, is your job a threat to your walk with God and your family, or is it the place you serve your God, and the way you provide for your family?

Of course, not all men struggle this way. There are also men who struggle with being lazy and weak. There are men who don't want to fight as leaders, who don't want to take their God-given privilege of leadership and use it for the benefit of others. They're tired, or they're not interested, or it's not their thing, and they create a vacuum of effort and leadership by giving in to lust and laziness, the twin leeches of a man's soul.

One of the worst examples of this comes from the story in the Bible of a wicked and weak king named Ahab. His wife Jezebel was a strong, domineering woman who reached right over and through him to do what he wouldn't do himself and in the process became one of the most tainted names in all history. When was the last time you met a precious little Jezebel?

Decisions need to be made. Action needs to be taken. Someone has to pay attention to what's going on, where things are headed, and take appropriate action in life. That's exactly what Christ did for us. And now men, He calls us to do that for others.

If you don't feel like doing things to help, if you don't feel like taking action to show love, do you really understand all that Christ has done for you? Do you really understand what He offers to you? Do you really understand that He promises never to leave you or forsake you, do you really know that you are being built into a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit? Do you really know the greatness of the power that is in you?

The strength to act, the courage and conviction to lead, come from knowing who you are in Christ. If you feel weak, tired, or confused, turn to the one who loves you and gave Himself for you.

You say you're weak, you don't have enough strength for this and He says:

Acts 1:8 "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"

Have you asked for that? You can. Daily, hourly, moment-by-moment, you can ask God for the strength to do what He's calling you to do. The Holy Spirit is in you for salvation, but are you asking Him to **come upon you** and give you strength for service, especially the

service He has commissioned you for, like loving your wife and leading your family? He's given you the task, He will also give you the strength.

You say you're tired and worn out, and He says:

Matt 11:28 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Have you asked for that? Have you prayed, "God, here I am. I need rest. I need Your rest. I want to put on Your yoke instead of the one I'm wearing all the time. I want to find rest for my soul. Will You show it to me?"

Have you come to Him to rest, *so that* you can get back up and go out in His name to love and help others? Or is that just totally alien thinking to you?

Do you believe this will work? Do you believe this is real? Friend, it is real. Men have given their lives for the truths of this book. Men have been taken from their families and put in jail or endured horrible persecutions and terrible deaths for believing the things found in this book. It is real, it is true, it's what you're looking for. But you have to receive it. You have to base your life on it.

You have to know that you are loved before you can love others. It's not enough to just take this all in, you have to take action on it, you have to build your life on it, you have to draw lines connecting the things you see and believe in God's Word with the things you depend on and take action on in your life. We don't need more Bible studies, we need more Bible believers.

Do you need wisdom, knowledge, understanding about what to do next? The Bible says,

Col 1:3 in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

If you don't know what decision to make for your family, have you prayed to God and sought it from Him? Have you turned to God's Word? Have you turned to His people? He wants you to know the right things at the right time. God does not want to see you fail at the tasks He has given you, especially if you need to make a decision that will affect one of His precious daughters whom you happen to call your wife. Have faith in Him, trust Him, turn to Him and depend on Him.

Christian brother, all of this and much, much more is available to you in Christ because He **gave Himself for** you, He sanctified and cleansed you, He made you holy and wipes out all your blemishes and see you without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

And then, He brings you in close.

We find three examples of the unity between Christ and the Christian in Ephesians. In Chapter Two He is the cornerstone and we are the brick being built into a temple for God. In Chapter Four He is the head and we are the body of Christ. And now in Chapter Five, He is the groom and we are the bride of Christ. The building, the body, and the bride are all illustrations to help us see that God is drawing us in close to Himself, showing us love.

And only after we understand all of this, are we told to love our wives as our selves. To reflect to them the love we have already received, and to see that she is part of me – 31 *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* And I am called to love her as my own true flesh, to be one with Christ and one with her, and to really blow your mind, one with Christ who is in her since we are both Christians.

So how do I do that? How do I express that unity and love to my wife? Sometimes it’s with acts of physical affection. What is a hug? An expression of unity. And sex is an even greater expression of becoming one flesh. Proverbs expresses this with beautiful Hebrew poetry. We’re told:

Pr 5:15 Drink water from your own cistern,
And running water from your own well.
16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
17 Let them be only your own,
And not for strangers with you.
18 Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.
20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman,
And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?

Stay away from things and people that will lead your heart away from her. When it comes to physical attraction and sexual activity, drink water from your own cistern. And build her up; let her know that you are satisfied with her, that you are enraptured by her.

But what else? Well, we’re told to love our wives as ourselves.

You know all of those things that you would really like to buy or do or places you’d like to go. She has a list too. When was the last time you took her to the mall, and didn’t grumble about it, but went happily, and put a \$100 bill in her hand and said don’t come back until you’ve found something fun for yourself? Splurge on her. Do stupid things for her that don’t make sense or aren’t practical, things she wouldn’t do for herself unless you pressed her. Sure she can paint her own nails, but pamper her with a pedicure and see how it makes her feel.

Keep a note on your phone about her: do you know her dress size, her shoe size, her ring size? Do you know her favorite flower, her favorite candy? Anything else she would like? When someone tells you about a great restaurant, write it down in your note – keep a list going of places you want to take her, things you want to do, things you might like. And if your list is short – talk to her, ask her questions.

Nourish her, cherish her. Make it easy for her submit to you and she will do you good. Proverbs 31 describes the ideal woman and what a blessing she is to her husband

Pr 31:12 She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.

Why? Because he loves her, and she knows it. She responds to his leadership and love.

It was the famous Puritan pastor Matthew Henry who made the observation that when God made woman she was made of a rib from Adam's side; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.

Brothers, marriage is a wonderful thing. It is helpful and, for most of us, necessary to navigate this life. It is God's idea.

But it's something we cannot fully understand or thrive in until we understand His love for us in Christ. So let me save you hundreds of dollars in counseling and simply tell you: if you marriage needs help, start working on your walk with God. Understand who you are in Christ, understand what He has done for you, and ask for the strength and wisdom to be able to reflect that to the woman He has placed in your life. He wants to do it, He wants to see your marriage thrive, and He wants to show more of Himself to you in the process.

Let's pray.