

ROLES

Ephesians 5

INTRODUCTION

Last week we began looking at the differences in the roles in marriage according to what the Bible clearly lays out. As we look at these roles, we are reminded that the world and culture look at these things very differently than the Scripture, and as a result some of us may find ourselves bristling or resisting what we hear. Now, I challenge you not to take my word for it... I encourage you to study and search the Word of God and let it be the Authority on these matters in your life.

I know for some of you, what you are hearing is new to you. I hope you are encouraged by what you hear in regards to God's plan and design. If you are engaged or thinking about marriage these truths are foundational and will set you up success. If you have been married for decades these truths shed light in areas of your marriage that may need work or relearning. It is never too late to grow, and we want to be lifelong learners of God's Word. Remember, the goal is to reflect Christ to one another and the world around you.

Last week we talked about what it looks like for the man to lead. This includes tending and keeping, exploring and protecting. To be a learner of his wife and to be a leader in the commands that God has given him. For the wife we looked at what it means to be a helper to your husband. We discussed that this title is not one inferiority as it is the very title God uses of Himself when He calls Himself our Helper (Ezer).

Today we are going to continue this discussion by looking at one of the more famous passages on marriage, Ephesians 5:22-33. But before we jump into that text it is always essential to get the context first. We looked a little bit at the context for this passage in Lesson 2. Some helpful reminders are that in Ephesians 5, prior to this passage, it says such things as, "walk in love", "walk in light", "walk in wisdom" and "be filled with the Spirit." It also says that as followers of Christ we are to "submit to one another in the fear of God." Each of these phrases (and their surrounding contexts) are important to consider before trying to digest the following passage on marriage.

THE ROLE OF THE WIFE: Submission

ASK: What are some of the things that come to mind when you hear the word "Submission"?

READ: Ephesians 5:22-24 – “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.”

Define What Submission Is Not:

- Submission is not obedience with an attitude. Your heart as well as your actions matter to God and to your husband.
- Submission is not falling down in fear (i.e. belly up, crying uncle) (i.e. it should not be something that feels “forced” by your husband, but rather chosen by you.)
- While we believe that a wife should submit to her husband “in everything” (verse 24), there are limits (Guzik).
 - You are free from your obligation to submit if submission requires you to blatantly sin (e.g. signing a fraudulent tax return). Keep in mind, we are talking about clear instances of sin, not matters of opinion or preference.
 - You may be free from your obligation to submit if your husband becomes mentally incapacitated or insane. However, in this role, your role as his helper will likely be very prominent.
 - You may be free from your obligation to submit if you or your children are threatened with or subject to physical violence.
 - You are free from your obligation to submit if your husband is engaged in adultery and he wants you to accept it.
- Submission is rendered towards your husband (“*wives, submit to your own husbands*”); it is not automatically rendered to any adult man or your adult male children.
- Some Christians historically have gotten this wrong, so it’s important to know that you do not have to defer to other men as you do to your husband. This isn’t to say that there is no submission outside of marriage as we are all called to submit to government authority as appropriate, as well as to those in church leadership or in the work place. The point is simply that the submission of a wife to her husband is unique.
- Furthermore, submission in marriage does not mean that we are against women being in leadership positions within society, such as in government or industry.

Define What Submission Is:

- Gk – Hupotasso (Hupo – under) (Tasso – to determine, ordain, appoint)
- Submission is choosing to rank yourself under or below your husband. Interestingly, the original Greek word for submission was a military term that spoke of arranging troops under the commander.
- Submission is choosing to trust the Lord. Verse 22 emphasizes this by saying that wives submit to their husband “as unto the Lord.”
- Submission is an attitude of the heart that says, “I trust the Lord to lead you,” and “I trust the Lord even if you’re wrong.”
- This is choosing to submit yourself to your husband even if he is not obeying God’s Word (1 Peter 3:1).

Share practical approaches to submission:

- Pray in the moment, “Help me Lord to trust you.”
- Pray for your husband and for direction.

A huge impact on the submission of wives is the next role of the husband.

THE ROLE OF THE HUSBAND: EPHESIANS 5:22 – 33

READ: Ephesians 5:22-33 – “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.”

In this passage we can pick out 4 major themes from this regarding roles for the husband. The first is **headship**, the second is our call to **love**, in the third, I’ve

combined the idea of **sanctifying and cleansing** & the fourth I've combined the ideas of **nourishing and cherishing**.

ASK: What comes to mind when you hear the word “Headship”?

Headship: Like we mentioned last week, the husband is called to leadership in the marriage and over the family. This is the case regardless of the man's personal qualities, intelligence, or capabilities. This means that as a husband, you are responsible before God for how you lead your wife and any children that God gives you.

While you may be able to delegate certain tasks (e.g. the tracking of finances), you cannot delegate the responsibility for what occurs in your home. Meaning, that as the leader, you will be the one to give an answer before the Lord regarding the state of your house. (Illustration with the 4 quadrants of life and the P4 vision trip.)

As you consider this responsibility, you may have one of two responses. First, you may feel puffed up and it can turn you into a dictator (i.e. the gentiles seek to lord over them – Matt 20:25). Second, you may feel the weight of the responsibility and shrink back from it. Neither response is good. What you need to know is that you cannot live up to this role on your own. You need the Holy Spirit living and working inside of you in order to live this out. God has put you as the leader of the home. As you follow Christ, He will make you the leader He wants you to be and the leader your family needs you to be. Let God teach you. Ask God to help you surrender to what He wants you to do.

One last thought on this. As a leader there may be times when you are faced with a decision and, despite discussion and prayer, you both disagree on the way forward. In those cases, we believe that the husband is tasked with making that call and assuming the responsibility for it. That said, these cases should not occur often, and if they are, it probably indicates that there is a larger source of sickness in the relationship. (But with healthy communication and prayer, these situations should remain rare.)

(Wives: Sometimes helping in these situations is allowing your husband to make the decision even if you think (or know) it is a bad decision. There may be some things that the Lord wants to teach your husband through this decision. Surrender to the Lord and ask Him to help you trust Him. Pray for your husband, love him through it, and resist the temptation to gloat if you're proven right.

Husbands: don't be mean or domineering in making these kinds of decisions.)

Called to Love: The husband is called to Love (agape) his wife “as” Christ loved the church (vs 25). In the same way that we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19) we too are supposed to lead in love. Headship, in this way, is the act of initiating and leading in loving our wives. Grasping the gravity of this is important because in modern English, the word love can mean different things. The term is often used to speak of infatuation, romance, lust, or sex. But the idea behind this in this passage is that it describes the love which Jesus had for His church. We’re told elsewhere that God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). This is the idea of sacrificial love; one that places your wife’s need above your own.

READ: 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 – “Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Sanctify and Cleanse: Properly speaking, the sanctifying and cleansing spoken of here refers to Jesus’ ministry over the church. But we see a pattern here that applies to the husband as well. As we spoke of headship earlier, the role of spiritual leader falls to you. You should be initiating godly activities that push the two of you closer to the Lord. Headship in this sense means being the spiritual leader.

One of the primary ways for doing this is by being regularly in the Bible with your wife, leading in church attendance, worshiping together, praying together, and by facilitating opportunities for her to be in the Word on her own. In short, you should strive to set a good model for your wife. At the same time, recognize the fact that you are a sinful human. But, be quick to repent and quick to forgive. Take your sin seriously and deal with it.

You will be exposed to her sin and, if you are honest with yourself, you will gain new insight in just how sinful you are as well. You both need to be cleansed by God’s word, especially when you work through the ugliness that comes from being a fallen human. In a healthy marriage you need to continually point one another to Christ.

In all of this, we encourage you both to come at this with an attitude of supporting each other and helping each other grow in Christ likeness. You will have a very difficult time if you approach this in an accusatory manner or with an eye towards

keeping score. Remember that as an image bearer of God you must always seek to reflect Jesus to one another.

Nourish and Cherish: This is a continuation of the previous discussion about love, but it also ties back to the garden analogy of tending and keeping. One potentially helpful exercise is to think of all of the ways that you, the husband, take care of yourself, your mind, your body, etc. Think of the time and effort you put in to feeling good and taking care of yourself. Once you have an idea of how much you nourish and cherish yourself, then consider if your nourishing and cherishing of your wife is even in the same ballpark.

Practical ways of going about this come back to studying your wife. Learn about how she feels valued, important, and special. Find out what her love language is and learn to speak in that language (Resource: The 5 Love Languages – Gary Chapman).

As we close out our examination of this passage, there are two more things to consider. The first is that God distinctly states that our marriages are a reflection of the mystery of Christ's relationship with the church. This means that you can look at every act of Jesus towards His disciples, towards the church, and consider that how He demonstrates His love towards us is the model of how we are to love our wife. In the same way that Christ makes submitting to Him easier because of how deeply He lavishes His love on us, we, as husbands, ought to make submission as easy for our wives as possible by leading well, loving well, being a true spiritual leader and caring for her needs.

The second thing is that we are given one more word of description for the wife to add to her role.

THE ROLE OF THE WIFE (Respect)

READ: Ephesians 5:33 – “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.”

ASK: How would you describe the difference between love and respect?

- As we talked about earlier, love speaks of the sacrificial giving of oneself to another.

- To respect someone means to esteem them, defer to them, or attach special regard or consideration for them.

It is surprising to consider the fact that the word Paul uses for “respect” is a strong one which elsewhere is translated as “fear.” For instance, when you read about the “fear of the Lord” elsewhere in the Bible, it’s the same word which is often translated as “respect” in this passage. In fact, the noun version of this word will show up in the passage that we’ll look at next (1 Peter 3:2). The idea that this communicates is not that a wife should be in terror of her husband, but that she should cultivate a respect and honor for her husband in her heart and actions.

As a reality check, please realize that none of this is easy. The command for the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church is virtually impossible to accomplish apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the command for the wife to respect her husband is virtually impossible to accomplish apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The more you live with each other, the more you will see each other’s sins and shortcomings. No doubt this may affect your ability to respect him but ask God to help you walk in His instructions. Look for your husband’s God given talents and abilities and encourage Him in his walk with Jesus. As he grows ask God to help your respect for him grow deeper.

Some practical ways that Respect may be acted out:

- Genuinely affirm the things your husband is doing well regardless of how big or small they might seem. Doing this will also help you avoid taking him for granted.
- Speak to your husband in an honoring tone, not condescendingly.
- Honor him in public and in private; speak well of him when you talk about him with others; never bad mouth him to others.
- Speaking well of your husband, and vice versa, is a powerful witness to others. In our culture, it is sadly common for spouses to speak disparaging of each other when they are with colleagues or friends. However, this runs contrary to God’s Word.

For those not yet married: One parting thought on this, if you don’t respect your fiancé now, you should consider waiting to get married. It is true that your spouse will grow in marriage and the making of a man often happens in the context of marriage but if you do not respect him now or see things in him that you respect that should be a big concern.

Earlier, we talked about the biblical injunction for the husband to die to himself in order to put his wife first. We can also say that the wife also needs to die to herself and put her husband first. She must learn what her husband needs and learn how best to help him. Remember you are learning to love and a part of that love is respecting. It's good for us who have been married awhile to reflect on these roles and ask God where we can grow and if there needs to be any change in our marriage so that we reflect Jesus more and more.

Q & A with Guest Speakers

Tell us a little about yourselves?

How long have you been married?

How many Children and their ages?

What's something unique about you that you can share with us?

From: Role of the Wife (submission) Eph 5

- Have you had a godly example of submission in your life? If so, what did that look like?
- Do you have an example of submission in your life that you can share (or anything that would help illustrate what Submission is and is not)?
 - o What does submission look like in your marriage? What helps you to submit? What have you learned about submission.

From: Role of the Husband: Eph 5

- Of the 4 categories we discussed from Ephesians 5 for the husband, (Headship, Love, Sanctify & Cleanse, Nourish & Cherish) is there one that stands out to you in a significant way? One that God has shown you any insights on?
 - o Is there a category that come more naturally to you or that you find easier to do than others?
 - o What category is most challenging to you and why?

From: Role of the Wife (respect) Eph 5

- What does “respecting” your husband look like when he is not acting respectable?
- What do you think are some practical ways that wives can respect their husbands?

General Questions on Roles

- What advice on Biblical Roles do you have for those in the class? Especially for those that may feel the cultural tug that runs contrary to Scripture?
- How would you encourage couples who have been married for a while but are still trying to figure out these roles?

On Your Own:

- Ask each other, “*What is one concrete kindness I can do for you this week?*”
- Discover your love languages (Matthew 7:12)
- How was submission modeled for you growing up? Was it a biblical example?
- Discuss the spiritual rhythms of your marriage (i.e. set aside times to pray, discuss the Word, worship together). What’s one area that you would like to grow in this area in the coming year? (Think in practical terms. Give tangible items you can act on.)
- Begin creating a list of ways your wife feels nourished and cherished.
- Talk about ways you can love/respect one another better. (If you make a list for this, consider what you each would say is the first, or most important item on that list.)
- Talk about headship and submission and what has been modeled for you. Ask yourselves how that has influenced your marriage or will influence your marriage.
- Discuss ways that you each feel respected.
- Resource: [The Meaning of Marriage](#) by Tim and Kathy Keller.