



Ephesians 5:22-33
Christian Marriage Pt 1

Christianity exists in great measure, outside the church. Out in the real world. With your real neighbors, your real spouse, your real parents and classmates, and it makes real demands of the way you interact with those people.

This morning things are going to get a little uncomfortable as we get deep into your personal life and look what's going on in your marriage, the place where your love for God is worked out first and most often. We're going to see what God has to say about what it means to be a wife and what it means to be a husband.

But here's what I need you to do: I need you to make an effort right here and now to just hear the Scriptures on this explosive issue. To set aside all the ideas and opinions you walked in here with and stop filtering this all through a grid you've built up through your own life and experiences, or your cultural background whether your Chinese or American or Filipino or German, whether you were raised Catholic or Baptist or Mormon or Hindu or atheist, whether you're a man or a woman, whether you're single or married or on the brink of divorce – would you just hear what the Bible says? "If anyone has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Does that sound familiar? It's from the Bible, it's from Jesus. He wants to speak to churches, He wants to speak to us, but we can't hear Him if our hearts and minds are already biased against what He's going to say.

So will you acknowledge the fact that you have your own ideas about marriage, you have your own ideas about your spouse, and would you acknowledge that you're going to try to set all that aside for the next 45 minutes and hear what God says without any prejudice?

OK. Here we go.

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.

Now the first thing I want to share with you is the big picture. We read all of this in Ephesians 5, but after saying all of this, we roll right into Ephesians 6 where children are told to obey their parents and parents are told not to frustrate their children. Now that sounds good, right? We recognize that's a problem – kids have a hard time obeying mom and dad, and sometimes mom and dad can have frustrating expectations of the kids. We see the problem there and we see the value of the instruction.

After that, we see instructions for workers and their bosses – workers are told to work as unto the Lord, seeking to benefit their employers and bring them profit, to work hard, while bosses are told not to exploit their workers. We see the need for that, don't we? We recognize the problem of lazy workers and greedy, unconcerned bosses.

But what about this instruction regarding marriage? Is this really a problem like the others? Do wives really need to be told to be respectful and submissive in a godly way, and do husbands really need to be told to love their wives?

Well, when you take a survey of the Scriptures you discover it actually comes up quite a bit. We discover similar instruction given in

Col 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

These were two separate congregations in two separate cities, and yet they receive the same instruction. So we can't write off what we find in Ephesians by saying it was just an isolated issue where the marriages in one town needed some extra help. No, there's a bigger principle involved.

In his letter to Titus Paul says the pastor should encourage the older women in the congregation to

Titus 2:4 ... admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 *to be* discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

He says that one of things that ought to be happening in the church is that older ladies should be teaching younger ladies how to be wives and mothers. It's practical discipleship, and one of the things they need to be passing on is what they've learned about submission because young marriages don't naturally start off this way.

That was true then, and it's certainly true today. It's not natural or easy for a woman to be submissive but according to Peter, a woman's deferential love for her husband can actually be an act of evangelism:

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives

So it seems pretty clear that God really is saying something about ladies submitting. But I want to ask again that you listen to the Scriptures and as much as it is possible, put away all your rebuttals or explanations or what ifs - we'll get there. But first, we need to hear God speak to us in plain and simple language through the Scripture because apparently, based on how many times we see it addressed, this is an issue we need to be aware of.

And apparently there is a tendency to drift away from this principle. Just as there tend to be problems in parent/child relationships and in worker/employer relationships, there naturally tends to a lack of submission on the part of women and a lack of love on the part of men – and all of this is being addressed to *people in the church!* Apparently even Christians need to be intentional and aware when it comes to their marriages. Christian wives need to be told to submit and respect. Christian husbands need to be told to love. These things don't just happen automatically for anyone.

So let me ask: Christian, are you willing to fight for marriage - your marriage and the marriages around you? Or, are you fighting the urge to laugh these things off because "it all sounds good, but you don't know my spouse"?

I don't care how you've lived in the past or for how long it's been that way, or why it's that way, I'm asking: how is your marriage going to look tomorrow in light of what you've heard today? Are you going to hear God's instruction and shake it off, or be shaken by it? Do you expect God's definition of marriage to change for you and your circumstances, or are you willing to change for the sake of a godly definition of marriage?

Will you push everything else to the side and receive what God has to say? Do you believe He knows best?

Friends, this is where we work out our theology, right here in the middle of issues like this. Do you trust God and His ways? Do you believe He always knows best? Are you willing to submit *to Him*? Or do you expect Him to be understanding and accommodating as you pull together some ideas that fit your situation a little better?

This isn't really even an issue of marriage, it's a test of loyalty – will you obey God? Forget about *what* He's asking you do specifically for a moment and see the question behind the question: do you trust God and will you obey?

Eph 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Your acceptance of this, even when it is hard, is seen as a direct act of worship: by you to your God. And that has nothing to do with the man you're submitting through – you can look right through that man and see Jesus and say, "I will do this for You, because I love You and I trust You."

And make no mistake ladies, that is what is at stake here – your devotion to Christ, first and foremost.

But have you ever considered, that when God calls you to submit, He's only asking you to do what Jesus Himself did.

You've got to know that.

This is essential Christian Theology – we believe that God is three in one. We believe in the Trinity. We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – all are equal in nature, but Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father, set aside His privilege in Heaven and took on human flesh in order to become a sacrifice for sin. We're told to consider that example in

Philippians 2:5 (ESV) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So when God tells you ladies to submit, it's not because you are inherently less valuable than men. It's not because you can't make your own decisions. It's not because you don't know what you're talking about. Jesus was God, is God, but He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. He submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

He submitted Himself to human parents – some of you teenagers think you know it all, you know how frustrating your parents can be – imagine if you're God and you're dealing with human parents and brothers and sisters.

But Luke's gospel tells us Jesus was submissive to His parents (Luke 2:15). And of course, He was submissive to the religious and political leaders that put Him death. Look, submission doesn't always go well for the one who is doing it. But God brings something better out of it if it is done for Him.

Ladies, as you seek to obey Scripture, as you seek to honor God by submitting to your husband, expect that it is going to be hard at times. Remember Jesus sweating drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified, praying, "Father if there is any other way, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done." That is submission. That is struggle. That is sacrifice. But it also changed the world.

And I'm certainly not saying your submission will change the world, but I'm saying you have Someone to turn to, you have Someone to pray to, you have Someone to cling to, when submission is hard.

And it will be hard at times, because the only way you can submit is when there is conflict.

When there is a difference of opinion or preference. When you want to see things done one way and it's not happening. And right there, right in that moment, right there in the car, or right there in Home Depot, or right there in the mall, or hovering over your laptop, you determine what [Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord](#) looks like in your life.

You feel like your husband isn't being decisive enough, or isn't paying enough attention, or hasn't made the right call. You get frustrated, and you consider a little marriage mutiny – you consider making a grab for what you want.

But ladies, I'm telling you, you don't want to let that happen. Because if you try to step in, one of two things is going to happen – either your husband is going to compete with you and it's going to escalate into a conflict because now it's a battle to see who is going to get whose way, or he's going to pull back and say, "fine, take it." And you'll gain control, but lose your husband. And you'll subtly lose respect for him in the process, because deep down, there's a part of you that doesn't want to win. There's a part of you, a God-reflecting part of you, that wants him to lead.

But what if He makes the wrong decision?

Well, who are you submitting to? [Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord](#). If he makes a knuckleheaded call, and he will at times, do you think God has the ability to protect you and even bless you for your obedience? Do you think God has the ability to reach right through your husband and touch your life directly because your act of worship and devotion to God has to pass through this man?

Of course He can. There's a great illustration of that happening with Sarah and Abraham in Genesis.

But there are also plenty of times when the foolish, ignorant, selfish, or just plain unfortunate choice of the husband leads to difficulty, loss, and pain for the wife and the family. And in those moments, you ladies have the opportunity to amplify your worship.

You choose to amplify your worship when you take your pain, your self-righteousness, your "I knew it" and your "I told you so" and pour them out at the foot of the cross. When you don't say a word to your husband, but you cry and shout to God and say, "I submitted as unto You." And I accept this because I worship You. I trust You. But would You help me to love him? May You love him through me.

Now, of course there are exceptions to this – they are common sense exceptions. You should never submit to anything illegal, immoral, or that goes against conscience or conviction or the Word of God. You're called to submit [as unto the Lord](#).

Would the Lord ask you to go along with any those things? Of course not. So, of course you don't have to go along with your husband in those matters. We could spend all morning talking about "What if" scenarios, but they would only distract us from the more common conditions where we are called to conform ourselves to Scripture.

We're talking about submitting in issues of where you go for dinner; what you should or should not purchase and in what color or size; whether to accept that job or not, or whether to even apply. Things that don't have clear cut, chapter and verse in the Scripture to turn to for guidance. Those are the areas where submission will be hardest. In matters of honest preference or opinion and when there is a difference there, if the marriage is going to move forward, someone will have to lead. The Scripture says that job has been given to the man.

But let's remember something else. Let's remember that both husband and wife are called to love, serve, and obey God. So, in a marriage where both he and she are seeking to grow in their spiritual maturity, seeking to know more of Christ and to serve Him more, exactly where and how often are you going to run into this issue of needing to submit? Not that often, because if both of your eyes are fixed on the same point on the horizon, if you're both headed in the same God-ward direction, you're going to complement, encourage, and help one another along the way.

In a truly Christ-centered marriage the issue of true submission rarely arises because there is so much mutual agreement. And then, all of the agreement does two things. First, it gets the couple's attention when it's absent – when there is a strong difference of opinion, it gets both his and her attention and slows them down, perhaps even to a stop depending on the magnitude of the issue. And second, if they can't resolve the disagreement, and a decision has to be made, it's much easier for the lady to accept because she knows this man has built up such a history of love and concern and respect for her, that even though she's not sure about this one, she's willing to trust him and to look through him to her God and say, "I'm doing this for you Lord."

That's the ideal, that's what we're aiming for, that's where we're trying to get.

But right now, some of our marriages are broken, some are just barely hanging on, and others have been built according to their own set of instructions instead of following God's plans. And we need to talk about that.

I'm talking about marriages where the wife no longer respects her husband. He embarrasses you, you're disappointed in him, you pity him and try to mother him. Has anyone ever described your marriage by saying "we know who wears the pants in that family?" Does that happen because people see you as such a fine model of submitting to your husband as unto the Lord? When you browbeat your husband, when you take charge, when you tell him it's time to go or what to do or how to do it, when you step in and take control, what do people see in you? What do the kids see? What are you teaching your own sons and daughters about marriage? Do they see the sweetness and beauty of Christ in you? Or do they see something twisted and corrupted?

There are marriages that encourage us and inspire us, that make us want to be better husbands and wives, that make us want to have what that couple has, and then there are the marriages that make other people feel awkward and that people wince at. Which one

are you?

And how do you handle the issue of submission? Do you force it on him and say, "Well, this is what I'm supposed to do – so here, you lead, let's go." Or do you come to him and set him up for success, gently encouraging him to take on the role that God has ordained for him so that both he and you can honor God by your obedience?

And as you submit, are you willing to forgive? Are you sympathetic to the challenge of leading? Is it OK for him to make a bad call every now and then, or are you still holding things against him?

And men, are you making this hard for her? If you know you have blown it in the past, if you made a bad choice regarding money or work or the family, and it didn't turn out right, have you admitted that? And have you asked her to forgive you, and have you thanked her for going along and supporting you anyway? And if so, ladies have you forgiven him? Have you forgiven him the way God forgives, which means not bringing it back up or holding it against him, or using it as a reason not to trust again?

Men, are you expecting her to be too submissive? Are you taking this verse the wrong way? Are you, in even a mild way, a chauvinist? Do you think you're called to lead because you're better? You need to remember God made Eve because Adam wasn't good enough on his own, he was missing something, so God brought him woman. God thinks you need her in your life.

And yes, she was called a helpmate. Eve was to be a helper for Adam. But you need to know that word for helper, it's ezer in Hebrew. It occurs 21 times in the Bible. Twice it refers to Eve, three times it refers to people looking for help, and 16 times it refers to God as man's help. So, whatever it means for her to be your helpmate, it's the same word used of God as your helpmate. Does that put things in perspective? She is the dedicated face of God's help in your life. Do you see her that way?

Yes, she is told to submit to you, but that's not because she doesn't have anything good to say or can't be trusted. If she disagrees, if she's not sure, that needs to be a flashing red light and a loud warning buzzer going off in your life and you need to search high and low until you find out what's going on. It may just be an issue of preference or opinion and someone has to make the call, but even if that's true, it's not your privilege to use your position to benefit yourself. You're called to love her, [as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for her](#). So, sacrificing your wants, desires and preferences for her should be normal.

Christian husband and Christian wife, you need to make a sober assessment of the condition of your marriage this morning. And if there is a difference between what you're doing and what God has said, you must, you absolutely must, figure out how to get recalibrated. We've already seen that marriage doesn't go this way naturally, even husbands and wives in the church need to be reminded of their roles, so take a sober look in the mirror and ask, is this what God wants?

Don't worry about yesterday and all your excuses or explanations; be focused on tomorrow and what things will look like if you obey.

Now, fair warning: things are going to get harder for you as you commit to change. Just like making a resolution to stop smoking or start working out or stop eating so many sweets. It's a good idea, but it's hard to do. So, how are we going to do it? Well, remember that Ephesians 4, 5 and 6 come after Ephesians 1, 2, and 3. So go back there and remind yourself of truth. Remember that God

Eph 1:3 ... has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Remember that Paul prayed for the Ephesians to know (1:17) **the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God**, (1:18) **the riches of the glory of His inheritance**, (1:19) **and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.**

He reminded them that (2:1) God had made them alive after being dead in sin and trespasses and that this was all by grace (2:5). And he told them that (2:10) we are God's **workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.** And that we have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ (2:13).

He prayed that they would be strengthened with might through God's Spirit in the inner man (3:16), that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, that they would be rooted and grounded in love, that they would be able to comprehend the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and that they would be filled with all the fullness of God because God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

God is calling you to do something hard, something you naturally drift away from, something that goes against the flow of our culture and your own personality at times, but He's also giving you everything you need in order to submit and obey – to Him first and foremost, and then to work that out in whatever role you find yourself.

Couples, you need to talk about all of this today. You need to turn to your spouse and say, "What did you think of what he said in the sermon?" And you need to talk about these things because this is the moment when God is calling some of you to change.

This is the moment when He is speaking to our congregation about these issues. He's bringing them up in this sanctuary, not in some book you picked up, not in something you heard on the radio or saw online, this is for us, The City Gates Church, right now, so what does it mean for you? You need to figure that out today.

Let's pray.