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**Series: Marriage God's Way**  
**Message: God's Vision for a Christian Wife**

**Transcribed Message**  
**July 17, 2022**  
**Ephesians 5**

If I were to ask you to summarize in one word, preferably a verb, preferably a biblical word, what you believe would characterize and summarize God's assignment for a Christian wife and a Christian husband, I wonder what those words might be. If you were to find one word in Scripture that is repeated frequently, that specifically relates to what God calls for a husband to do or what God calls for a wife to do, what might those words be? You would be hard-pressed, I think, to come up with two better words than for the Christian husband that he should love his wife and I think you'd be hard-pressed to come up with a better word for what summarizes what God says to Christian wives than the word "submission".

When you go to the various passages in the New Testament like Ephesians 5, like Colossians 3, like Titus 2 or 1 Peter 3, and if I counted properly this past week, there are some 13 different times in those four passages in which God says to Christian husbands you are not only to be leading your home, which we'll look at next week, but you're to do it in a way that expresses and shows how Christ loves the church. It seems to me that the word "love" in relation to a husband's responsibility fits very nicely with what God has called husbands to do. Then what you think in terms of what it is that God has said with regard to a Christian wife's responsibility, we see repeatedly and consistently the word "submission". I don't think it's enough for us just to say husbands love your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands. We need to know a little bit more about that, don't we? We need to know what exactly does that mean.

What does that look like? What is it that God expects of each of us in that regard? That's what we want to do this morning. We're going to look at a biblical vision for what God has set forth with regard to Christian wives and then, Lord willing, next Sunday, and we anticipate wives that your husbands won't come up with a suddenly planned weekend getaway for next week, but they'll come back and hear what God has

to say about the Christian husband's responsibility. But this morning, for marriage to picture Christ and the church, submission needs to be a part of that story. God's intent is that it is noble and good.

Let's set the context which is really kind of a review for us as we've looked at this series for a number of weeks now. Let's remind ourselves first of all just how important it is that we commit ourselves to following the word of God and not the world. Both of those are presented to us oftentimes, aren't they? The word of God is what we want to follow and not the world. When we were in Genesis, God beautifully and powerfully put before us His vision for marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. He just laid the groundwork and the framework that Scripture comes back to every time.

It was there that we learned that marriage is to be a heterosexual relationship. It's one man and one woman. It's to be a monogamous relationship with one man and one woman. Anything that deviates from what God put forward in Genesis 1 and 2 is a deviation from God's plan and from what He laid down by way of this foundation. But last Sunday, we were looking at Genesis 3 when sin entered into the world and sin ruined all of that. It ruined the harmony and the oneness and the very purpose for which God had designed this husband-wife relationship, not as some say that sin brought headship and submission. I don't believe that's the case. I believe that was in place in Genesis 1 and 2. But what sin did to is it twisted the way we apply those things within our lives, within our marriages. Rather than having loving headship and rather than having willing submission, now we know that there is a result that is not nearly as keeping with Scripture. In Ephesians 5, what does Paul do? He comes back and he says listen husband, this is God's calling on your life. You're to love your wife as Christ loved the church. We'll see that. This morning we look at this matter of wives, submit to your husbands as the church submits to Christ.

As we think of that, we look secondly at the fact that we need the gospel to do these things. We need the gospel in our lives. We need the gospel in our life and we need self-awareness. When I say self-awareness, understand I'm talking about Psalm 139. I'm just simply saying search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my way and see if there's something in me that You need to adjust and correct and change. We need the gospel. We need the gospel, but we also need to have an awareness in

our life of the changes that we need to make. We need to be able to see honestly and openly what the word reveals to us. The more we understand the gospel, the more we understand our need.

Don't you find it interesting that the apostle Paul as he writes to all of these various churches and he is writing to believers. He is writing to believers. He is writing to churches. Don't you find it fascinating that he always makes a beeline to the cross? At some point, usually in the beginning, he makes a beeline to the cross and he reminds them of their need and of the provision. He reminds them in essence of the bad news, the not-so-good news of our great need of a savior because of sin. But he also consistently reminds us of God's provision and of the good news of what God has done for us.

Let's look then this morning at wives who submit. As I said, I promise we'll come back next Sunday and we'll step into husbands who love and lead the way God has called them to. Where it all begins. In Ephesians 5, it all begins in my mind by going back to the very first verse of this chapter. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 1, this first verse, the first couple of verses covers it all because look what he begins with in this chapter: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." here is the guiding principle in other words for everybody. He's going to talk to a lot of different groups within this chapter, but he begins by simply saying this is the beginning point right here. This is nothing less than the gospel. This is the gospel being lived out in our life. We're to be imitators of God. We're to reflect the very life of God. The gospel is what always lifts us up. It's the gospel that always points us to Christ. Paul could have, and often does in other places, go back to Genesis. When he talks about marriage, he'll often go back and talk about Genesis, as we've already mentioned. But in this particular context in Ephesians he takes us to this great drama of the redemption of Christ. He takes us to the picture of what the gospel has done in our lives and this calling in the very first verse to be imitators of God. That to me sets the tone for everything else he is going to say. Align yourself with the heart of God. Align yourself with the purposes of God.

Then notice that familiar verse in verse 18 tucked away right before this section in which he deals with marriage, that familiar verse in verse 18 when he tells us that we

are to be filled with the Spirit. Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. Be controlled by the Spirit. It is a calling to align ourselves not only with the gospel but to be living it out in the power of the Holy Spirit. What we have here is really an emphasis on obedience and reflecting the very work of God in our life. Marriage requires that we be filled with the Spirit. Marriage and everything else requires that we be filled with the Spirit. this is the present tense command. This is something we're to be doing every day all of the time. The greatest antidote to our greatest problem in marriage is the control and filling of the Holy Spirit. The greatest problem that I have in my marriage is selfishness and self-centeredness and pride and ultimately sin. Here is Paul calling us to walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to serve others, to live our life for each other. Apart from that, we're not going to do that. Apart from that, we're going to live for ourselves and that, of course, results in conflict within the marriage relationship.

Then I just want you to see thirdly as the context is set for the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter that there's no apology offered for verse 22. When we come to verse 22 Paul simply begins this section and says wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. I don't need to tell you that to modern sophisticated ears, this is like a nonstarter. This is offensive. This is ridiculous. This is like we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Carlon. This may have been okay for the 1<sup>st</sup> century but we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But Paul doesn't do any of that. He just simply calls us to be imitators of God. He calls us to walk in the truth of the gospel. He commands us to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in the filling of the Spirit, under the control of the Holy Spirit. He flows simply into these family/marriage relationships and begins by calling wives to be in submission to their husbands. It was challenging no doubt in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It is challenging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Me? Submit to him? I don't think so. I have a different idea about how this relationship should work. But what if the truth of verse 22 and Colossians 3 and Titus 2 and 1 Peter 3 in which it is repeatedly stated that God's vision for you in this home is that you be in submission to your husband? What if that truth was really noble and good and for blessing?

Let's see if that is what God has in mind. I start off by looking at what submission is not. What submission is not. I want to begin with what is obvious to us if we've been together in these weeks because we saw this clearly in Genesis. The first thing we say

is it's not a matter of inferiority. I know those sounds like empty words to our modern ears because it just seems that it doesn't fit. But this isn't a matter of inferiority or of superiority. You know that what Genesis 1 and 2 clearly taught was that there is total equality between a man and a woman. There is total equality with regard to their personhood. There is total equality with regard to their destiny. There's total equality with regard to their dignity, their standing before God. There is no difference in that regard. His blessing is equally seen in the image of God in both of their lives. They bear their equal moral responsibility before God for their choices. All of that is before us.

Verse 22, you notice, is addressed to whom? It is addressed to wives. Wives, submit to your husbands. It's noteworthy. He does not tell husbands: Here's a message for you to communicate to your wife that she should be in submission to you. that is never the case in Scripture. In every instance in which God gives directions with regard to marriage, He speaks to the person that He is addressing in terms of their accountability to Him. He speaks directly to husbands. He speaks directly to wives. He doesn't need a mediator between Himself and your wife. He speaks to her and He says this is what I'm asking of you. You don't need to tell your wife this. In fact, it is probably a simple principle that it is not a good thing to be telling your wife that because God has fully given that word to her in the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse.

Secondly, it's not passivity and it's not silence. It's not passivity. It's not silence. Submission and passivity are not synonyms. That's an old husband's tale. They are not one and the same. Passivity and submission do not go hand-in-hand. That's not what God is asking of wives. Let me ask you a question. Do you think a wife should try to influence her husband? Be bold. Do you think the wife should try to influence her husband? That sounded like a lot of female voices but I'm all for that. Of course, you should. What is 1 Peter 3? She is to be so engaged in this heart for her husband and influencing him for Christ that her very way of living is living out her faith. Peter says to do it even without words. Obviously, wives are given a responsibility to influence their husbands for good. Clearly that is not at all in conflict with this idea of submission.

When you read Proverbs 31, is there anything about Proverbs 31 that brings to mind the word passivity? No, it's a woman who's bold. She's courageous. She's strong. She's active. She's engaged. She's influential. She's successful. Everything that you

can think of. If we think of submission as somehow being silence, we're totally missing the picture that Scripture gives us of a godly woman. It doesn't mean that she never criticizes her husband. It doesn't mean that she never makes requests of her husband. Submission doesn't mean that she never offers suggestions for life within their home and their family and their marriage. Submission is not sitting and nodding in agreement to everything that her husband says. That's not an accurate picture of submission in Scripture. I certainly hope that's not our understanding. Every husband needs constructive criticism. Every husband needs constructive criticism. There are things that Bonnie is going to say to me that frankly I don't know if anybody else will, but she has not only that responsibility, but that's something that I would want. Nobody wants to be constantly torn down. That is irrespective of marriage or any roles. But constructive criticism we all need. Helpful suggestions we should all desire. We all need to be teachable. I would hope, guys, that your wife is teaching you things every day because we're to learn from each other in that sense. That's not a matter of submission or not submission. We're to learn from each other.

There are no prescribed lists for what husbands and wives are to do in the Bible. Don't you find that kind of interesting? In terms of all the things that God has given us instruction about, whether it's within the home, within marriage, all those things, the Bible is often without lists of this is what you need to do or this is what someone needs to do. I think it's because every marriage is different. Every relationship is different. There isn't a personality that a woman has that is a submissive personality. A woman can be very outgoing and an extrovert. She can be assertive and strong and bold and be an incredibly godly submissive woman. But you can also be a woman who is very introverted, very quiet, very nonassertive, at least in terms of public engagement or otherwise, and be very unsubmissive. There isn't a caricature that we should have in our mind about what a submissive woman is in terms of her external demeanor. It is, as we're going to see, much more than that. The Scriptures are clear with regard to what submission is not. It's not a matter of inferiority. It's not a matter of passivity.

Thirdly, it's not without limits. It's not without limits. Look at verse 24. "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." What does that mean? That she is to submit to her husband in everything. There are

limits to that. One of those limits is that you're not putting your husband in the place of Christ. There is one person who is at that central point in our life and that is Christ. It is to Him alone that we give that kind of allegiance. It is to Him alone that we offer our worship in that way. You are not putting your husband in the place of Christ. That 24<sup>th</sup> verse isn't saying that. I think the other limit is certainly that you don't follow your husband into sin. If your husband asks you to do something that is clearly outside of God's will and purpose, you simply say I can't do that. I can't do that. That violates my conscience. That violates my faith. That is not to be understood as a lack of submission.

I think what is being said there is simply that there is no area of your life that is cordoned off from your husband in everything. You're submissive to your husband in everything. There isn't an area of your life that is preserved, protected, or out of bounds for him in that sense. What is it that we have already seen in Genesis? That marriage is this call of God to a man and to woman, to leave father and mother, to cleave to each other, to become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed because there was this openness and transparency, this oneness of heart and purpose. That I think is what is in view in that 24<sup>th</sup> verse. Our lives are open to each other in everything. We are in that way committed to a positive picture of what God desires for us.

If those are things that submission is not, and we can add others, but we'll limit it to that. Let's look on the positive side and see what then would we say submission is. The very first thing that we can say is submission is a biblical principle. Submission is a biblical principle. Again, many today look at this command and they say no, this is not for me. It is not for today. This must have been for a different time and a different culture. What Paul meant here with regard to this 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> verse that had to do with the different culture. We aren't living in that culture anymore. And again, that's simply to miss what Paul is saying here.

One of the things that we would say to that is we don't pick and choose. We don't go through the Bible and pick and choose the verses that we want to follow and obey and those that we don't. We understand that we're to rightly handle the word of truth. We understand that there are differences under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant. We understand that we're not bringing an animal to offer on a sacrifice on the

altar this morning. There are differences obviously in those regards as to how we understand and interpret and handle the word. But, in this case, this particular command to wives is repeated multiple times. In fact, in every passage in which Paul addresses marriage, he mentions this as a biblical principle.

Someone almost always says okay, well and good it is a biblical principle. But Carlton, what about verse 21 when it says we're submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ? Many egalitarians –remember egalitarians, complementarians. We'll touch on this a little bit more next Sunday, Lord willing. But complementarians like myself and many of you no doubt see that within the context of marriage and within the life of the church there are roles and responsibilities that God has given to husbands and to wives, to men and to women. Egalitarians say no, there is not just equality of being made in the image of God, but there are no distinctions. You can have men preachers and you can have women preachers. You can have women doing anything a man can do because there is equality in terms of roles and function. They often point to verse 21 and say right here it is. Be submissive to each other. Everybody submits to everybody.

What would we say about that? There's a number of things we could say about that. The first one would be that when Paul mentions that in verse 21, be in submission to each other, he's in effect giving us I believe something of an overview of what is to come. He is not saying in verse 21 that everybody is going to submit to everybody in terms of without distinction. He is not saying that everybody is going to submit to everybody in the same way. There is no passage of Scripture in which a husband is told for instance to submit to his wife, but that is always the statement that is made about wives to husbands. You read through this list. There's never a point at which children and parents reverse roles. Verse 21 is not a reversal of roles. It is not saying these are all interchangeable. Parents are never told to submit to their children. Children are often told to submit to their parents. Think of the relationship between Christ and the church. The church is to submit to Christ. We never read nor would we expect that Christ would submit to the church. The fact that verse 21 is there does not negate what he says in verse 22. We do have a biblical principle here that sees submission as what God has called wives to do within the context of the home.



The fact of the matter is this. If submission is only seen as something that's negative, if submission is seen as burdensome, if submission is seen as chauvinistic, then we've missed the teaching of Scripture, and it's been taught incorrectly. Which it has, I believe often. I think some of it is what we've already spoken to. But what we have here is that there is this calling that God has given to wives to place themselves in this relationship with Christ, to represent Him, and to be in submission to their husbands.

Secondly, it is fundamentally an attitude. It is fundamentally an attitude. It's an attitude that expresses itself in actions, but it is fundamentally an attitude. When we think in terms of what God has called the husband to do and be. Again, I'll probably elaborate on this further next Sunday, but as God has called husbands to love their wives and lead their families, God has equally called wives to be helpers and completers. To me, those are the roles that God has given to husbands and wives. The role that he has given to a husband is to be the head of his home and the leader of his home. How does he express that? He expresses it in loving his wife as Christ loved the church. The role of the wife in the home is that of a helper, of one who corresponds, of one who completes him. It's a word that is used of God Himself. It's used of the Holy Spirit. How does she express that? She expresses that in an attitude of submission.

I don't think a wife's role should be defined as submission. I think her role is defined as being a helper and one who corresponds to her husband, but she expresses it in submission. Here this is an attitude of the heart. I think that's why when you come to Scripture, you don't see a list of things that this is what a submissive wife does. If we had lists like that, it would very easily become legalistic. God is not interested in our doing things on the list. He is interested in what's going on in our heart. That's the way the Bible puts this forward and that's why it looks different in each marriage. That is why we don't have some cookie-cutter vision of what submission looks like. It's going to look different in your marriage than it does in ours. You're going to express this truth differently with each other than another couple does. Fundamentally, submission, ladies, is an attitude of trust and respect towards her husband. It is fundamentally an attitude of trust and respect.

This is what John Piper says about it: "Submission is an attitude that says I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for the things and you lead with love. I don't flourish when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works." But the attitude of Christian submission also says: "It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. you know I can't do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond creatively and joyfully to your lead, but I can't follow you into sin. As much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage, Christ is my King." So again, submission says I'm glad when you lead. I'm glad when you give family a sense of direction. I am at my best when I can support and encourage and come alongside and offer creative ways for this to happen within the life of our family. I love it when you ask me for input and get my opinion about things as we walk through life together.

Thirdly, submission is towards her own husband. It's towards her own husband. That's the point of verse 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. The sphere of influence is in your home. the sphere of influence is to your own husband. It is not to every man in every circumstance. It is to your own husband. This is what is called an intensive possessive pronoun. It is expressed in that statement – your own husband. The idea is there is an exclusivity to this matter of submission. It's to your own husband – own, as in the sense of intimacy, of being in this together. It is towards your own husband. It is not towards men in general. It's not with regard to outside of your home and whatever your work experience or environment might be. It is to your own husband.

Then fourthly, it's an act of obedience to Christ. It's an act of obedience to Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. As to the Lord. In the final analysis, the wife's submission is technically not even to her husband. It's to the Lord. She submits to the Lord. It is nothing less than an act of worship and obedience to God. I think that's why he starts off the way he does in verse 1: be an imitator. Put forward this vision of what it looks like to be a Christ follower. It's not based on who your husband is. It's not based on how wonderful your husband is. And we know he is wonderful, but it's not based on who he is. It is not based on what he's doing per se. it is based on your obedience to the Lord.

In 1 Peter 2:13, it's not talking about submission within marriage, but says the same thing that our submission is to the Lord. When Paul writes in Titus 2:5 talking about marriage, talking about submission, he talked about the fact that the word of God would not be dishonored as we walk in obedience. In 1 Peter 3:5 there is adornment, there is beauty within this relationship between the husband and wife. Here to me has got to be the most encouraging thing. Even, ladies, if your husband does not see it and even if he does not appreciate it, God sees it and God does. I think that's honestly why you can have that statement that you do in 1 Peter 3. This is ultimately an act of worship. It is ultimately an act of worship to God. I know there are difficult marriages and I know there are hard places for wives to step into this truth of submission to their husband, but when Paul says it is submission as to the Lord, that is a statement of encouragement to you that there is an audience of one, and He sees your heart. He sees your active obedience. He sees your sense of trust in Him even in the midst of a very difficult circumstance. It again is just living out the gospel. For marriage to picture Christ and the church, submission has to be a part of the picture. It has to be a part of the vision that is being put forward part of the story. God's intent is that it would be noble and good.

What do we take away? We know the ultimate example of submission that we have in Scripture is Christ Himself. Christ to the Father. In fact, I think as you look at these passages, it's a wife's calling to really reflect and be a mirror of the life of Christ being lived out within her life. Like Christ, as she walks in obedience to God in this area, she too will be exalted. She too will be honored. She too will experience God's blessing. When you think of that statement that I referenced in 1 Peter 3 where Peter is writing to wives who are actually married to husbands who do not even know the Lord: "Likewise wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct." That is an amazing promise. An amazing step of faith. A wife who is in perhaps one of the most difficult marriage relationships with an unbelieving husband who has no regard for her faith, no regard for her walk with God perhaps, but yet she is to live out before him this truth of submission and trust so that the very truth of the gospel is mirrored in her life to her unbelieving husband. She can in

fact influence him for Christ and ultimately see him come to a point of faith as well. I think of Philippians chapter 2 verse 5 where it talks about Jesus submitting Himself and not holding on, but rather allowing the Father's will to be done in His life and ultimately experiencing the Father's well done, good and faithful servant and dear son. That is God's calling to all of us, living out this gospel.

Husbands or wives, single or married, young or old – we are called to live out the gospel. The gospel says to us in the first part, the bad news, that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We've all failed to achieve God's standard of righteousness. But the good news is that Jesus came, died on the cross, rose again and God said if we will believe and trust that what He did was enough for us, He will give to us the gift of eternal life. That obviously is what all of us desire for each other and for each of you.

Let's pray together. Father God, I thank you this morning for these marriages that are represented at Covenant and, Father, the future marriages that will one day be realized. I thank you for your truth. I thank you for your Spirit who comes alongside of us, who is our helper who allows us to walk in this truth and so fulfill the love and the law of God. I pray, Father, for the wives of Covenant. I pray that you will strengthen and bless them. I pray that you will honor their faith and trust in you and that they will represent you well to not only their husbands and their families, but to all that they are able to influence for the gospel. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.