

Ephesians 5:22

Introduction

We come now to a new section in the book of Ephesians. It may not be obvious at first, since there is no chapter break.

But what he begins to do here in verse 22 is deal with the issue of relationships between three categories of people:

Husbands and wives, in 5:22-33

Parents and children, in 6:1-4

Masters and servants, in 6:5-9

It is vital that we understand and implement God's perspective on how such relationships should be ordered.

The failure to do so is the cause of all of the conflicts between marriage partners, parents and children, and employers and employees.

The divorce rate, the teenage rebellion, and the labor unrest that is rampant in our country, are all eloquent testimonies to the fact that we cannot ignore God's precepts and prosper in our relationships.

The God who created us is the one who knows how we ought to deal with each other; and we ignore His counsel to our peril.

I must warn you at the outset that the Bible's teaching on how these relationships should be ordered runs in direct contradiction to the philosophy of our age.

Modern marriage counselors, child psychologists, and management-labor relations experts would be horrified by the Biblical teaching on these issues, and would universally condemn them.

It is not without reason that 1 Corinthians 2:14 declares that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the natural man.

The Bible's teaching on these issues runs directly contrary to the philosophy and teaching in our day and age with reference to these matters.

And yet the massive problems that are manifest in all these areas show that the world is pursuing exactly the wrong course in regard to these matters.

It is time for us to listen to God's counsel regarding these matters. What He has to say is not politically correct. But it is eternally right, and it will bear good fruit in those who practice it.

You see, because of our sinful natures, we do not naturally know how we ought to order our relationships. Jeremiah 10:23: O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

Therefore, we must have a healthy distrust of our natural inclination and reason, and rely upon divine revelation contained in God's Word, to guide us in every area of life, especially in this area of relationships.

The first of these relationships that is spoken of in the extended section is that of the relationship between the husband and the wife.

The reason why this is spoken of first is that it is the most basic and important of all human relationships. All other human relationships are founded upon and flow out of this relationship between a husband and a wife.

Sound social relationships and sound parental relationships flow out of sound marriage relationships. When marriages break down, so does every other area of society. God established the first marriage, and instituted it for the blessing of men and women; and He has also in this passage given to us directions on how it should function and how it should be ordered. We want to consider that together today.

The God who created man and woman and who designed and ordered the first marriage is the God we ought to look to as to how we ought to function in our marriages after we enter into them.

Now, specifically, God has set forth the roles and responsibilities and attitudes that husbands and wives are to have towards each other. Marriages are not to function just any old way. God has defined and fixed roles for husbands and wives; and we must follow them carefully.

He begins with the role and conduct of the wife, and then moves on to the husband. We will consider them in that order as well on successive Lord's days.

Notice Ephesians 5:22-24, 33 In vs 33, reverence=respect

The teaching of this passage is simply this:

Proposition: The responsibility of the wife to the husband is one of submission and reverence (or respect).

1A. The Nature of This Submission vs. 22

The word "submit" means to place oneself under the authority of another. It is a military term which means to rank under. It describes one who submits to another, is under his direction, and accountable to him for his actions.

It is the same word used in James 4:7: Submit yourselves therefore unto God.

Notice several aspects of this submission.

1B. It is to be a self-imposed submission

Wives—submit yourselves

This is not something a husband forces upon his wife from without.

It is something she is to impose upon herself from within.

It is to be a willing, voluntary submission. She consciously and intentionally places herself in a position of subordination to him. This does not mean, however, that because it is voluntary, it is to be optional or occasional.

This is: an imperative verb – a command

a present tense verb – a continuous action

She must, continuously, voluntarily, and willingly put herself under the authority of her husband.

Even if her husband does not require this of her, she is to place herself in a position of submission to his leadership.

2B. It is to be an exclusive submission

To her own husband.

She is not required to submit to any and every man that happens to come along. She should not allow herself to be coerced or pressured by another man into doing that which she does not believe is wise, or is contrary to her husband's instructions. A woman owes courtesy and respect to all men and to all women, but she owes obedience to only one, and that is her husband, unless a man holds some other position of authority, such as a magistrate or a pastor of her church. However, civil authority and ecclesiastical authority have entirely different spheres of authority than does her husband.

3B. It is to be a Christ-oriented submission

“as to the Lord”

1C. ‘As’ implies a similarity—

There is a parallel between the wife's submission to her husband and her submission to Christ. As she submits to Christ, so in the same manner she is to submit to her husband.

How does she submit to Christ?

1. Voluntarily,
2. Willingly, and
3. With a good attitude – cheerfully. It is not a grudging clenched-jaw submission. It is not full of resentment or rancor.
4. With sincerity and integrity. She does not seek to evade and avoid the difficult and hard commands. She prays for the grace to be able to carry out Christ’s commands.

This is how she is to submit to her husband – in the same manner. Though Christ and her husband are not equals, the manner of submission and the attitude of submission to both of them is similar.

2C. ‘As’ implies a motive

“As to the Lord” means: As an act of submission to the Lord – or as an act of obedience to the Lord.

As part of her obedience to the Lord, she obeys her husband. A Christian woman first submits herself to Christ. As an act of submission to Him, she submits herself to her husband because Christ requires her to do so. That is all the reason a Christian woman needs in order to submit herself to her husband.

So it is as she thinks of the Lord, and is aware of how she submits to the Lord, and is aware that she must submit to the Lord, that she finds both the manner of her submission and the motive of her submission to her husband laid out before her and brought to her awareness.

Notice: None of this has to do with the qualifications that her husband might possess. The manner of her submission and motive for her submission has nothing to do with him. It has to do with her relationship to Christ. Her relationship to Christ is the whole basis upon which her behavior towards her husband functions; and whether he does his responsibilities properly or not is irrelevant. She still must do her responsibilities, because she does them to the Lord.

1 Peter 3:1-6: Sarah submitted herself to Abraham and revered him—not because Abraham was the perfect husband - far from it- but because that was the God-ordained role that God had given to her. She was obedient to that God-ordained role and therefore is held up as an example for Christian women to follow.

2A. The Reason for this Submission vs. 23

Why is it that a woman is to submit to her husband? (vs. 23) She is to submit to her husband, because the husband is the head of the wife. The word “head” is used in a figurative sense to convey the idea of leadership and responsibility; as well as rule and authority.

Illustration: When we say that Mr. Smith is the head of the department, what we mean is that he is responsible for its conduct, and that he provides it with leadership and direction. This is what headship means. We recognize that this type of hierarchy is indispensable in endeavors involving more than one

person. Without hierarchy there is chaos. An army must have its general, a company its president, and a family its head.

A house divided against itself cannot stand, and a home with two leaders will self destruct if one heads one direction, and the other goes off in another direction. Someone must lead and someone must follow. God has ordained that the husband lead and the wife follow. This is not man's idea. This is God's idea—man didn't dream this up as a way to oppress women. Rather, God designed it for the blessing of all. God has provided for order in all relationships.

Notice 1 Corinthians 11:1-3

Even within the Trinity there is a headship and submission. Jesus said: I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me. This forever destroys the notion that submission implies inferiority.

God the Father and God the Son are equal in their attributes, essence, dignity, worth, majesty and character. Yet one is submissive to the other. So it is between man and woman – Just because you have different roles, does not mean you are either intrinsically inferior or superior.

Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

When you go to work for a company—just because you are subordinate to your boss does not mean you are inferior to Him. You would never think that. You simply understand that he has a different role than you do. Each must do their job. If you reverse roles, it results in a mess.

Furthermore, the man is not without his Head either. Just because he is the head of the wife, does not mean that he is free to do as he pleases. He too has a Head to whom he is accountable and to whom he must submit. So submission is not just for women. It is binding upon men as well, in that they are to submit to Christ.

Now, because of this principle of male headship, one of the duties that a wife is to render to her husband is that of reverence or respect.

Note: Eph 5:33 – She is to reverence her husband. Why? Because of his position of headship. This doesn't mean worship. What it does mean is that just as she respects and shows deference and honor to those who are her superiors such as an employer or magistrate, so she is to show respect to her husband. A sneering contempt for authority is never right. We may not be able to respect a person because of his conduct, but we must respect him for his position.

Romans 13:7 says that we are to render to all their proper respect and honor which their position entitles them to. That goes for husbands as well. It is their position, and not their performance, that entitles them to the respect of their wives.

The wife is to show this respect by both word and conduct:

1. By word

She is to speak as well of him as she can, and as well to him as she can. Respectful language to him and of him is what is proper. In Genesis 18:12 Sarah called her husband “Lord,” even though his conduct at times was hardly befitting of one who bears that title.

2. By conduct

She is to do her best to carry out both the letter and the intent of his directions. When she does not undermine or circumvent his directions, but does her best to implement them, then she is showing respect for his position and authority.

3A. The Extent of this Submission vs. 24

How far does a woman go in following the husband’s directions?

As the church is subject unto Christ--this is the standard and example

1B. This submission is to be comprehensive

In everything—She is not to be subject to her husband’s will only when it coincides with her own or seems pleasant and reasonable to her.

It is to be rendered in every area of life. It is not limited to any one department or sphere of life.

Be it the way: The money is handled,

The way the kids are raised,

The extent and the nature of the recreation and social activities pursued,

The place you live,

Or the goals you have.

In every legitimate area of married life, the wife is to submit to her husband in everything.

This does not mean the wife becomes a mindless servant of the arbitrary whims of another individual. She is to think, to give input, and to show initiative with reference to these things.

This does not mean that she has no will or preferences in these matters.

But what it does mean is that when everything that can be said has been said, and there is still a conflict between the husband and the wife, then she must submit her will to his.

The church does not yield to Christ in some areas while reserving the right to self-rule in others—and neither must a wife do so to her husband. Now you might think: That puts her in a very vulnerable position. What if her husband is not wise or kind or godly or good? What if he is a fool?

The comfort she has in such a situation is this:

1. In submitting to her husband, she is really submitting to Christ. He receives her submission to her husband as submission to Him, and He will greatly reward her for it.
2. Those who make the final decisions bear the final responsibility. God will not call her to give account for any poor decisions her husband made.
3. She can trust Christ to work in the heart of her husband for her good. Proverbs 21:1 says: The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. As the rivers of water, He turneth it whithersoever He will. She is told in Romans 8:28 that God will work all things together for her good, and that includes all the decisions her husband makes. His heart is in God's hand, and God will move his heart to make those decisions that are best designed by God to help her to become like Christ. She simply needs to have faith in God that He is working what is best in her life through the decisions of her husband.

Now even though this submission is to be comprehensive, it is not to be absolute.

2B. This submission is not to be absolute

A husband's authority does not supersede Christ's authority. The wife need not, indeed she must not, submit to clear violations of the Word of God. Acts 5:29 says: We ought to obey God rather than men.

Example: Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira - Sapphira should not have refused to participate in her husband's lie.

Qualifications:

1. Divorce—when a husband has repudiated his position as head by divorcing his wife, she need not submit to him.
2. If he becomes mentally incompetent—senility, Alzheimer's, disease, etc. she need not submit to him.
3. If he is under the influence of alcohol or other mind altering drugs, she need not submit to him while he is under their intoxicating influence.

Conclusion:

Proverbs 14:1 says: Every wise woman builds her house

Proverbs 13:19 says: A contentious wife is like a continual dripping

Proverbs 31: 11 says: The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her—he knows she will do his will. She does him good. Then notice at the liberty she is given in the rest of the chapter. When he knows that she is loyal to him, and can be trusted by him, then he can give her tremendous liberty to exercise her own judgment in many matters.

Woman was not created to be man's guide, but to be his helper.

Titus 2:5 says that the older women are to teach the younger women to be obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed