

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #17

Ephesians 5:22-33

Back in 1935 Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said this: “Whatever may be the mind of the modern world regarding the sacred relationship between husbands and wives, the Christian doctrine is not obscure. Misgoverned affections on the husband’s part might unwittingly concede to the wife the ruling place in the home, or her own force of character might assume the place of directing; but it stands unchallenged to the present hour that the highest peace and greatest spiritual blessing result when believing wives and husbands are duly conformed to these plain and wholesome instructions” (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 134).

Now the instruction we are about to examine is given to believers. No unbeliever is part of the body of Jesus Christ. No unbelieving husband is likened to Christ and no unbelieving wife is likened to the Church. So this instruction is aimed straight at Christian husbands and wives. If you are a believer and not married, these things are not specifically addressed to you, although there will be some things you can find applicable. In fact, you may think “I am glad I am single.” If you are a believer and you are married, this is aimed straight at you and here is what this text says:

GRACE AGE BELIEVERS ARE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY ARE BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD BY THEIR ATTITUDES AND THEIR ACTIONS AS HUSBANDS AND WIVES IN THEIR MARRIAGE.

If husbands and wives actually knew and applied what is in these verses it would revolutionize their relationship with God regardless of what it accomplished in their marriage.

We come now to one of the great mysterious theological teachings of the Apostle Paul. In fact, Paul said concerning this teaching that this is a “great mystery” (5:32). Paul is going to use teaching about marriage to communicate great theological truths about the Church.

Now let us say that whatever view the modern world has about marriage is not the same as the view of God.

Now the data here in Ephesians is not isolated data. There are several passages where Paul specifically discusses God’s household codes and rules for the home and how it is to function—**Eph. 5:22-6:9**; Col. 3:18-4:1; I Tim. 2:8-15; 6:1-10; Titus 2:1-10. This is also discussed by the Apostle Peter—I Pet. 3:1-6.

Now any application of these biblical principles is a choice. No one can force anyone to do this; however, if one is willing to choose to do this that one will in fact please God and be highly honored by God.

AREA OF INSTRUCTION #1 – Instruction to the wives . 5:22-24

There is a very clear and very plain word from Paul and from God to wives and that is they are to submit to their husbands with a respectful attitude (5:33). There was an old professor one time who said marriage is an educational union between a man and woman where the man loses his bachelor's degree to never have a chance at acquiring his master's degree.

The word “submit” (υποτασσω) is not the word “obey,” although very often obedience is connected to submission. The word actually means to recognize the rank position of someone over you and put yourself under that authority (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 463). When a wife chooses to be submissive, she shows she is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Now this instruction about submitting has nothing to do with superiority versus inferiority . Submission does not mean inferiority and we can prove our point in a context that deals with this very subject. Turn back to I Corinthians 11:1-3. Now let's ask this question- Does the fact that God the Son is submissive to God the Father in any way mean that Jesus Christ is inferior to God the Father? Does the fact that Jesus Christ has His Father over Him as His head mean He is less inferior in His Person? Absolutely not! So you see, submitting to authority does not mean you are inferior to the one to whom you submit.

By the way, what did that actually mean in the life of Christ? It meant He always did the things the Father asked Him to do. It meant He realized there were things that His Father knew, such as the actual date of His return, that the Father kept reserved for Himself. So submission does not mean inferiority.

Now there are three features to a wife's submission to her own husband:

Feature #1 - Wives are to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord . 5:22

Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, which truly does up the ante. Now the phrase “as to the Lord” as I understand it means that a wife is to consider that her submission to her husband is something she does for the Lord, realizing when she submits to her husband she is submitting to the Lord. Now since a comparison is made between the wife and her husband and Christ and the Church (5:24), **we certainly know that this is not a forced submission.** As a wife willingly submits to her husband, God views it as an actual submission to Jesus Christ. The calling of the wife is to submit to her own husband.

Feature #2 - Wives are to submit to their own husbands because he is the head . 5:23

Now Paul says there is one reason why a woman should submit to her husband and that is because in the structure of things God has designed it so that the husband is the head of the wife in a similar way that Christ is head of the Church.

In other words, God has appointed a position status to the husband as being the head. Now notice that this is qualified by Christ being the Savior of the body. What that means is that it is the husband's job to protect his wife and deliver his wife from things that could physically or spiritually harm her. A husband cannot spiritually save his wife, only Jesus Christ can do that, but a husband should take the lead in pointing his wife to Jesus Christ and also in doing that which will protect her from any destruction. The wife is to submit to her husband and trust that he will make the necessary decisions and provisions to deliver her from danger.

Feature #3 - Wives are to submit to their own husbands in everything as the Church is subject to Jesus Christ. **5:24**

Now the wife is to submit "in everything" (εν παντι). I understand this to mean that she should willingly submit herself in the character and quality (anarthrous construction) of all kinds of things. That is pretty clear. She should be faithful to her husband (I Cor. 7:10-11); she should meet his intimate needs (I Cor. 7:3-5); she should develop a godly spirit that reflects inward beauty (I Pet. 3:3-5).

But we need to keep this in mind that Paul qualifies this as submission like that of the Church to Christ. What that would mean is that if the husband is not obeying Scripture then the woman is not under the obligation to submit. **She should not ever submit if her husband asks her to do something contrary to God and His Word.** This is not some unconditional submission of a wife that would sin if the husband wanted her to. For example, Paul just said we are not to participate in evil things (5:11). If a husband asked his wife to participate in evil things, she should not submit. If a husband were physically abusive, which is a violation of the law, she should not willingly submit to that.

Now she is to submit to her husband in the same way that the Church submits to Christ. We know that whenever the Church submits to the Word of God there are great benefits and blessings. The wife can expect the same thing. There are three observations we want to make before moving on:

- 1) The wife's submission is not based on any conditional element determined by the husband's demonstration of love; it stems from her love for the Lord.
- 2) The wife's submission is of her own willingness and is not a forced submission any more than it is forced obedience to Jesus Christ and the Word of God.
- 3) The wife who willingly does submit can expect to see great benefits and blessings God will directly give to her.

AREA OF INSTRUCTION #2 – Instruction to the husbands . 5:25-31

I'll bet by now you ladies are saying it's about time you got to this part. Back in the first century Roman world, wives had obligations to their husbands, but husbands didn't have many toward their wives. Paul was about to change that for Grace Age believers. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. That is the standard men of how we are to love our wives.

I read a story of a man who was in a theological school preparing for ministry and he went to one of his teachers and said that "he thought he loved his wife too much." The teacher said, "Do you love her as much as Christ loves the Church?" The young man said "of course not." The teacher said "then you better get with it."

The word "love" (*αγαπαω*) is the key word of this section and it is used six times (5:25, 25, 28, 28, 28, 33). This is not the friendship or the erotic word for love. This is God's highest kind of love. This particular word for love is one that emphasizes a love choice that is not even merited, deserved or earned. This kind of love is a volitional love that chooses to love the object regardless of the response. The husband is to love his wife even at times when she doesn't deserve it or hasn't earned it.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson cited an old quotation that John Chrysostom made about this. He said, and I am paraphrasing, if you see the measure of submission for the wife, also hear the measure of love for the husband. If a husband would like his wife to obey him as the Church does Christ then the husband should treat his wife as Christ treats the Church. What that would literally mean is that a husband should be willing to give his own life for his wife if necessary.

Just as a wife's submission is not determined by the husband's response, neither is the husband's love determined by the wife's response. There are four realities brought out here about a husband's love for his wife and Christ's love for the Church.

(Reality #1) - He made the ultimate sacrifice for the Church in that He sacrificed Himself in the past . 5:25

A husband is to be willing to make sacrifices for his wife. Think about this; Jesus Christ willingly handed Himself over to sacrifice Himself for us because He loved us and **He did not love us because we were perfectly loveable**. Husbands who are waiting for their wives to become perfectly loveable are not thinking or loving right.

(Reality #2) - He desires to sanctify the Church in the present . 5:26

I cannot think of one time in my Christian life when Jesus Christ has dominantly demanded a forceful submission. He gives me time to make adjustments in my life in regard to God's Word. Notice how the Church is sanctified; by washing it with the Word of God. Christ's desire is to set the Church aside unto God. That is the love the husband is to have for his wife. His focus should be on his own wife and not someone else's wife. He should be interested in communicating the Word of God to her so that she too could be sanctified.

(Reality #3) - He desires that the Church be a glorious reflection in the future . **5:27**

Jesus Christ wants the best for His Church in the future. He does not want His Church to go through the Tribulation. Neither should a husband want his wife to go through the Tribulation with him.

A husband should love his wife with the idea that the love will have no wrinkles or spots or blemishes. The husband should continually love his wife and care for her from the past time to the present time and on into the future time.

(Reality #4) - He loves the Church as His own body . **5:28-29**

A husband is to love his wife as his own body. Marriage is not just about the pleasure of a man, but also his wife. Notice the statement at the end, “he who loves his own wife loves himself.” Just as **verse 29** says, the husband should nourish and cherish his wife, just as Christ does the Church.

Frankly if a husband is willing to sacrifice everything for his wife and makes her welfare of primary importance and if he cares for her as he does his own body, no wife would ever have to be afraid to submit to a man like that and she certainly could respect him.

AREA OF INSTRUCTION #3 – Instruction to the Church . **5:24-32**

Carefully notice **verse 32**, because the teaching here is not just about husbands and wives, it is about the Church. Do not overlook the fact that this is instruction pertaining to the Church. God has a plan for Israel and He has a plan for the Church. He never says that the plan for Israel is to present her glorified without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish. He calls Israel His apostate wife, who will one day be forgiven and restored. He does not call her His chaste bride. **The husband and wife relationship pictures the love and loyalty that should exist in the Church.** There are deep applications in this text about the Church and its relationship to Jesus Christ:

- 1) The Church should submit to Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. **5:22-23**
- 2) The Church is loved by God at the highest level–Jesus Christ gave Himself. **5:25**
- 3) The Church is to be clean at a sanctified level–made clean by the washing with the Word. **5:26**
- 4) The Church should develop in a holy, blameless, wrinkle free sanctification. **5:27**
- 5) The Church is nourished and cherished by Jesus Christ. **5:29**
- 6) The Church is part of the body of Jesus Christ. **5:30-32**
We should all cleave to Him.