

## **Bigger than Marriage**

*Ephesians 5:22-33*

### **Introduction**

What is at stake in marriage? Is it just our happiness? Just our health? Why does God care about our marriage? Why should He have a say in our lives regarding who we should marry and how we should conduct ourselves in marriage?

The reason that God cares about our marriages is because something bigger than marriage is at stake. Something more eternal, more permanent is at stake in the way that we conduct ourselves in marriage. The glory of God is at stake in our marriages.

M.P.T. – Because the glory of God is at stake in our marriages, we must look to Him for guidance on how we are to live in our marriages.

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### **Ephesians 5:22-33**

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body.

<sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

<sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

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### **Exposition**

#### **I. Submission in Marriage (Vss. 22-24)**

According to Paul, there is a temptation in marriage for a wife to rebel against the leadership that God has given to their husband. And this temptation is nothing original or new. We see it in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve rebel against God. In Genesis 3, we are told that, as a result of sin, Eve rebelled against the leadership of Adam, but that Adam was the one who God had chosen to lead. In verses 22-24, Paul calls wives back to God’s ideal for their marriage. “Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”

Now, for some, this may sound misogynistic or sexist, but I want to encourage you to stay with me. There are a few things that you need to notice about this passage before you make a final judgment. First, this passage does not instruct women to be submissive to all men. No. The submission is in the context of a loving, covenantal relationship. Women, in general, do not have a responsibility to submit to men. Only wives to husbands in a way that reflects the submission of the church to Christ, which brings me to the second thing that I want you to see...

Second, the passage assumes that the husband is Christ-like and leading his wife in obedience to and love for God. Or, at the very least, the husband in this passage is not leading his wife to live contrary to God's will. And husband who is attempting to lead his wife to disobey God is not worthy of a wife's submission. Furthermore, if a wife is in an abusive situation, she has no obligation to remain in that situation and submit to the abuse. In such cases, the wife should report the abuse to the proper authorities both inside and outside of the church and find a safe place to live with the help of others. The submission that a wife owes her husband depends upon where he is leading her and the rest of the family. She must submit to the authority of Christ above the authority of her husband.

Third, we need to see that this passage places the responsibility of submission on the wife, not the husband. In other words, Paul addresses the wife directly, which means, she has the responsibility to submit herself to the leadership of her husband. It is not the husband's responsibility to submit his wife to himself. She must do so willingly. It is her decision, not the husbands, and any attempt to force this dynamic in the relationship will be disastrous.

Finally, we need to recognize that submission in the context of a relationship does not devalue the person who is under the authority of someone else. Or, to put it another way, having a subordinate role in a relationship does not make you less valuable or worthy of honor. So, while there is truly a subordination of role in the marriage relationship, meaning, the husband is called by God to lead while the wife submits to her husband's leadership, that does not mean that the wife is less valuable or not deserving of full dignity, respect, and love.

Now, to be sure, husbands have and often do misuse the dynamics of this relationship between husband and wife. They joke about "submission." Or they use passages like this to make demands that are detestable. Furthermore, the conduct and attitude of some husbands is not worthy of a wife's submission, which is why Paul spends the bulk of His time dealing with how husbands should treat their wives...

## **II. Sacrifice in Marriage (Vss. 25-31)**

Look at what Paul calls the husbands to in verse 25 and following, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." In other words, Husbands, love your wives with sacrifice and the goal of making her more like Christ through your own efforts to love her, care for her, and even die for her, if necessary. The submission that Paul calls wives to in verses 22-24 is matched by his call to husbands to lay down their lives for the sake of making their wives more like Christ.

I can't help but wonder how many husbands, even in this room this morning, wish that their wives were more submissive to their leadership in their marriages, but who are not willing to love their wives as Christ has loved the church. This passage does not give you permission to be waited on "hand and foot." Husbands, this passage is not teaching your wives to serve you and meet your every need. This passage is not giving you permission to be a jerk or something worse. This passage is calling you to lay your life down for your bride!

And men, if you would lay your life down in service, love, and care for your wife, then you would not have to tell her to submit to your leadership. She would jump at the opportunity to follow you in deeper obedience to Christ.

But you say, “But that’s hard. That is going to require a lot of work for me to care for her like that. I don’t have the energy to love my wife like Christ loved the church. I can’t do it. In fact, I won’t do it. She doesn’t love me that way. Why should I love her like that?”

Most of our marital conflict stems from our misunderstanding and failure to realize that marriage results in a one flesh union between husband and wife. And this union is not simply or even merely a physical or sexual union. It is a union of life together such that our needs, our goals, our affections, and our purpose become one. The union that results from marriage brings two people together and makes them one body. This is why Paul says in verses 29-30, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” In other words, the reason that you feel like it would be a burden for you to love your wife like Christ loves the church is because you have failed to see that you are one flesh together. You are so infected with selfishness though that you are attempting to pull apart what God has joined together.

Husbands, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must strive to love our wives as our own flesh. We can no longer think about our marriage as “Me against her, or me against him,” instead, our marriages must be thought of simply as “we.” “We” are together. “Us.” There is not separating myself from my wife. We are joined by marriage. Therefore, her needs are my needs. Her concerns are my concerns. Her fears are my fears. Her insecurities are my insecurities. And we will work through these difficulties as a union that God brought together for a greater purpose, which is what we find in these final verses...

### **Conclusion - Mystery in Marriage (Vss. 32-33)**

So, why is the wife called to submit to the leadership of her husband in marriage? And why is the husband called to love and care for his wife in marriage? Because Christian marriage points to the relationship between Christ and his Bride, the church. In other words, Christian marriage is a walking, talking, living, breathing drama about Christ’s redemptive relationship of love, care, and submission with his Bride. Christian marriage should be a living demonstration of how Christ loves His Church and the church submits to Christ.

So, if people were ever to wonder about Christ’s love for the church, they ought to be able to look at Christian marriages and see aspects of the depths of Christ’s love and the obedience and willingness of the Church’s submission. Which is why we must look to God for guidance and strength for our marriages. The glory of God is at stake in our marriages. Which means that we will fail to make much of His glory if we are not constantly looking to Christ for more grace and mercy for our marriages.