

Sermon on Marriage Relations

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Text:

Ephesians 5:21-33 ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

1 Introduction

We continue with the epistle from Paul to the churches in Ephesus and Asia Minor. We look at Ephesians chapter 5:21 – 33, which describes the Christian way of relationship between a husband and a wife.

Paul begins this section by calling on the husband and wife to submit to each other out of profound awe, respect and love for Christ. That is, where there might be a tendency to not submit the marriage couple should submit out of this deep-seated feeling of honor for Christ. Then Paul explains what this call to submission means for the wife and for the husband. For the husband, it is to love the wife in the Pauline sense of the word and for the wife it means to respect the husband and follow the husband's lead.

2 Call to submission by the wife

Paul calls a woman to submit to her husband when he says in verse 22 and 23 of our passage, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” This call is based on the structure of a team. Every team must have a leader. Someone once said, “Lead, follow, or get out of the way.” Without a leader there is anarchy. When God instituted marriage he set it up as a team that is indivisible when he said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

The roles for the marriage team are further elaborated in Genesis 2:18, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” After God made man, he realized that each of the animals was a two-person team and so the scripture says “but for Adam no suitable helper was found.” (Gen 2:20b). That is, Adam needed to be a team so God then declared that, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” (Gen 2:18a).

What will make the team good?

God determined to turn the one-person team into a two-person team by adding a new and complementary team member as he says “I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Gen 2:18b) The Hebrew word for “helper” implies “the fitting into a unity in which each helps the other equally.” The intent of the word translated into the English word “helper” is therefore not to create a subordinate relationship but to create a team relationship where each has a different and complementary role. This is the role described by Paul in Ephesians, which has been misconstrued to mean that the woman is less than the man. The roles may appear so but they are to be viewed in the context of a team. In a team there is a leader and the team members must submit to the leader. All members of the team work toward one goal and the good leader works with the rest of the team to achieve the goal.

3 Call to Submission by the Husband

Paul calls a man to submit to his wife when he says in verse 21 of our passage, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The husband must assume the role of spiritual leader of

the house. This requires him to develop the qualities and skill of a spiritual leader through dedicated Bible study and intense prayers.

The nature of the love the husband must show to the wife is elaborated by Paul as follows:

- You should care for your wife so much as to deprive yourself to make your wife comfortable and successful. The love that Christ showed to the church is to die for the church. But if you physically die then you cease to become the woman's husband. So it must mean that Paul is talking about a dying to self in favor of the wife.
- You should take care of our wife as if you were taking care of a part of your body because Paul says in verse 31 of our passage that "the two will become one." If you are one then you are like one physical body. You would not pull out your own hair, or strike yourself, or insult yourself. So you should not do the same to your wife who is part of your body. In fact, Paul then stresses that you should first and foremost observe the second greatest commandment in your marriage: Love your neighbor as yourself.
- You should develop your wife to become holy by taking the lead in Bible study and practice of the Word of God so that by osmosis your wife becomes godly.

J.B. Phillips has translated Paul's definition of love recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 as follows:

- This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience – it looks for a way of being constructive.
- It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.
- "Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage.
- It is not touchy.
- It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people.
- On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.
- Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything.
- It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.

[H. Norman Wright, "Marital Counseling: A Biblically-based behavioral, cognitive approach"]

4 Love leads to Respect

Paul concludes this section with Ephesians 5:33, “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” The structure of the sentence in the original language shows a causative word linking the husband’s love to the wife’s respect. In other words, the husband must take the lead and love the wife in the fullest meaning as we have discussed and then it will naturally follow that the wife will respect and submit willingly to the husband. R.C. Sproul puts it this way, "would a woman be afraid to submit herself to a man who loved her as much as Jesus loved the church? Would a woman fight and kick and scream against the leadership of a man who was willing to give his lifeblood to do anything he could to save her life?" The answers to R.C. Sproul’s rhetorical questions are “no” and “no.”

5 Conclusion

God established marriage for the man and woman to be in a two person team working together for their mutual society and benefit to serve God’s purposes including among other things procreation. Marriage was the first social institution God established after creating man. In fact, it was established in the period of innocence; that is, before the Adamic fall. Being an establishment of God, Satan opposes it fiercely as he opposes all establishments of God. Satan tries to put revolt in a marriage through pride and lack of submission among the couple. Through this passage, God is calling the marriage team back to submission.

The man must submit to the woman. Yes, you heard me right. The man must submit to the woman by loving her as himself even depriving himself to the point of death just as Jesus Christ loved the church and suffered for her to his death. Wife abuse is immoral and a great sin and anyone who abuses his wife mentally or physically is a mad man. If you are abusing your wife I call upon you to be a man and love your wife instead.

The woman must submit to the man and support the leadership of the man in the team. The man is the leader of the team and the woman must do whatever possible to support that leadership. I see too many marriages where the woman has usurped the leadership of the man and it has brought problems. To you women, I say help your husband to be the leader God has designated him to be.