

## Husbands Who Love Like Christ & the Wives Who Submit to Them

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Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. 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, 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. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. Let not your adornment be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you. Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.

Let's jump into this text at verse 31. It's a quote from Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." In the next verse (v. 32) Paul looks back on this quote and says, "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

Now why is the coming together of a man and woman to form one flesh in marriage a mystery? Paul's answer in verse 32 is this: the marriage union is a mystery because its deepest meaning has been partially concealed, but is now being openly revealed by the apostle, namely, that marriage is an image of Christ and the church. Verse 32: "I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

So marriage is like a metaphor or an image or a picture or parable that stands for something more than a man and a woman becoming one flesh. It stands for the relationship between Christ and the church. That's the deepest meaning of marriage. It's meant to be a living drama of how Christ and the church relate to each other.

Notice how verses 28-30 describe the parallel between Christ and the church being one body and the husband and wife being one flesh. "Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it. . . ." (In other words, the one-flesh union between man and wife means that in a sense they are now one body

so that the care a husband has for his wife he has for himself. They are one. What he does to her he does to himself. Then he compares this to Christ's care for the church. Picking up near the end of verse 29, he says the husband nourishes and cherishes his own flesh) " . . . as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body." In other words, just as the husband is one flesh with his wife so the church is one body with Christ. When the husband cherishes and nourishes his wife, he cherishes and nourishes himself; and when Christ cherishes and nourishes the church, he cherishes and nourishes himself.

If you want to understand God's meaning for marriage you have to grasp that we are dealing with a copy and an original, a metaphor and a reality, and parable and a truth. And the original, the reality, the truth is God's marriage to his people, or Christ's marriage to the church. While the copy, the metaphor, the parable is a husband's marriage to his wife. Geoffrey Bromiley says, "As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people" (God and Marriage, p. 43).

One of the things to learn from this mystery is the roles of husband and wife in marriage. One of Paul's points in this passage is that the roles of husband and wife in marriage are not arbitrarily assigned and they are not reversible without obscuring God's purpose for marriage. The roles of husband and wife are rooted in the distinctive roles of Christ and His church. God means (by marriage) to say something about His Son and His church by the way husbands and wives relate to each other.

We see this in verses 23-25. Verse 24 speaks to the wife about her half of the metaphor and verses 23 and 25 speak about the husband's half of the metaphor. Wives, find your distinctive role as a wife in keying off the way the church relates to Christ. Verse 24: "As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands." Then to husbands: find your distinctive role as a husband in keying off the way Christ relates to the church. First verse 23: "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." Then verse 25: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Think about this for a moment in relation to what we have seen so far in this series. I tried to show from Genesis 1-3 that the when sin entered the world it ruined the harmony of marriage NOT because it brought headship and submission into existence, but because it twisted man's humble, loving headship into hostile domination in some men and lazy indifference in others. And it twisted woman's intelligent, willing submission into manipulative obsequiousness in some women and brazen insubordination in others. Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive.

Now if this is true, then the redemption we anticipate with the coming of Christ is not the dismantling of the original, created order of loving headship and willing submission but a recovery of it from the ravages of sin. And that's just what we find in Ephesians 5:21-33. Wives, let your fallen submission be redeemed by modeling it after God's intention for the church! Husbands, let your fallen headship be redeemed by modeling it after God's intention for Christ!

Therefore, headship is not a right to command and control. It's a responsibility to love like Christ: to lay down your life for your wife in servant leadership. And submission is not slavish or coerced or cowering. That's not the way Christ wants the church to respond to his leadership: he wants it to be free and willing and glad and refining and strengthening.

In other words what this passage of Scripture does is two things: it guards against the abuses of headship by telling husbands to love like Jesus; and it guards against the debasing of submission by telling wives to respond the way the church does to Christ.

Maybe what would be most helpful here would be to give a crisp definition of headship and submission as I understand them from this text, and then raise an objection or two and close with some practical implications.

Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership, protection and provision in the home.

Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.

I'll come back to some practical implications of those definitions in a moment. But first let me say a word about a couple common objections.

The ideas of headship and submission are not popular today. The spirit of our society makes it very hard for people to even hear texts like this in a positive way. The most common objection to the picture I just painted of loving leadership and willing submission is that verse 21 teaches us to be mutually submissive to each other. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

So one writer says, "By definition, mutual submission rules out hierarchical differences" (Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, p. 154). In other words if mutual submission is a reality between husband and wife, then it's a contradiction to say the husband has a special responsibility to lead and the wife a special responsibility to support that leadership and help carry it through.

What shall we say to this? I would say that it is simply not true. In fact the writer who said that mutual submission rules out all hierarchical relationships shows that it's not true a page later when he says, "The church thrives on mutual subjection. In a Spirit-led church, the elders submit to the congregation in being accountable for their watch-care, and the congregation submits to the elders in accepting their guidance (p. 155, on p. 251 he even says "the congregations submit to their leaders by obeying . . ."). In other words, when it comes to the church he has no trouble seeing how mutual submission is possible between two groups one of whom has the special responsibility to guide and the other of whom has the special responsibility to accept guidance.

And that's right. There is no contradiction between mutual submission and a relationship of leadership and response. Mutual submission doesn't mean that both partners must submit in exactly the same ways. Christ submitted himself to the church in one way, by a kind of servant-leadership that cost him his life. And the church submits herself to Christ in another way by honoring his leadership and following him in on the Calvary road.

So it is not true that mutual submission rules out the family pattern of Christ-like leadership and church-like submission. Mutual submission doesn't obliterate those roles, it transforms them.

One other common objection to the pattern of leadership and submission is that the term "head" does not carry the meaning of leadership at all. Instead it means "source," somewhat like we use the word "fountainhead" or the "head of a river" (Bilezikian, pp. 157-162). So to call a husband the head of his wife wouldn't mean that he is to be a leader, but that he is in some sense her "source" or her "fountainhead."

Now there are long studies to show that this is not a normal meaning for the word "head" in Paul's day. But you'll never read these articles because they are too technical. So let me try to show you something from these verses that everyone can see.

The husband is pictured as the head of his wife as Christ is pictured as the head of the church, his body (see vv. 29-30). Now if the head means "source," then what is the husband the source of? What does the body get from the head? It gets nourishment (that's mentioned in verse 29). And we can understand that because the mouth is in the head, and nourishment comes through the mouth to the body. But that's not all the body gets from the head. It gets guidance because the eyes are in the head. And it gets alertness and protection because the ears are in the head.

In other words, if the husband as head is one flesh with his wife, his body, and if he is therefore her source of guidance and food and alertness, then the natural conclusion is that the head, the husband, has a primary responsibility for leadership and provision and protection.

So even if you give "head" the meaning "source" the most natural interpretation of these verses is that husbands are called by God to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership and protection and provision in the home. And wives are called to honor and affirm the husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.

Now I said I would come back to some practical implications.

1. The call in verse 25 for husbands to "love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her," revolutionizes the way he leads. This is where we ended last week in Luke 22:26 where Jesus says, "Let the leader become as one who serves." In other words, husbands, don't stop leading, but turn all your leading into serving. The responsibility of leadership is given not to puff yourself up, but to build your family up.

2. Submission does not mean putting the husband in the place of Christ. Verse 21 says you submit out of reverence for Christ. Submission does not mean that the husband's word is absolute. Only Christ's word is absolute. No wife should follow a husband into sin. You can't do that in reverence to Christ. Submission does not mean surrendering thought. It does not mean no input on decisions or no influence on her husband. It does not come from ignorance or incompetence. It comes from what is fitting and appropriate (Col. 3:18) in God's created order.

Submission is an inclination of the will to say yes to the husband's leadership and a disposition of the spirit to support his initiatives. The reason I say it's a disposition and an inclination, is because there will be times when the most submissive wife will hesitate at a husband's decision. It may look unwise to her. Suppose it's Noel and I. I am about to decide something foolish for the family. At that moment Noel could express her submission like something like this: "Johnny, I know you've thought a lot about this, and I love it when you take the initiative to plan for us and take the responsibility like this, but I really don't have peace about this decision and I think we need to talk about it some more. Could we? Maybe tonight sometime?"

The reason that is a kind of Biblical submission is because 1)Husbands, unlike Christ, are fallible and ought to admit it. 2)Husbands ought to want their wives to be excited about the family decisions, because Christ wants us to be excited about following his decisions and not just follow begrudgingly. 3)The way Noel expressed her misgivings communicated clearly that she endorses my leadership and affirms me in my role as head.

When a man senses a primary God-given responsibility for the spiritual life of the family, gathering the family for devotions, taking them to church, calling for prayer at meals - when he senses a primary God-given responsibility for the discipline and education of the children, the stewardship of money, the provision of food, the safety of the home, the healing of discord, that special sense of responsibility is not authoritarian or autocratic or domineering or bossy or oppressive or abusive. It is simply servant-

leadership. And I have never met a wife who is sorry she is married to a man like that. Because when God designs a thing (like marriage) he designs it for his glory and our good.