

Sunday, May 2, 2021 | What No One Told Us About Parenting

Week 4 | Ephesians 5:21-33 | “The Husband/Wife Agreement”

Announcements:

- Pray for Patricia Haas, who has a heart catheterization on Monday.
- Alan Harris will be with us next Sunday for Mother’s Day.
- Michael Cuocci’s outreach for the poor.

A couple weeks ago, we started a new four-week series called ‘What No One Told Us About Parenting.’ This series seeks to answer questions about some of the most demanding areas of raising a family.

REVIEW:

The first topic we tackled last week was a child’s nature. Because of Adam’s disobedience, all of his descendants are exiled. But because of Christ’s obedience, all of his descendants are exonerated. More than a child needing correction, they need transformation through the life-changing power of the Gospel.

The second topic was the respective role of the child and parent. Children are to obey and honor their parents, while the parents are to not provoke their children to anger, nurture and admonish them. But ultimately, the parent and child ought to serve one another as if they were serving Christ.

Then, last week, we discussed the issue of caring for an ailing loved one. While every parent out to do their best to make wise decisions with their time, finances, and health to minimize the possibility that they would need help later in life, it is still up to the child to care for their aging parents. This is not only repaying a parent for raising a child, but it is also an act of worship for God, and it is greatly celebrated by God. And any so-called "Christian" who does not take care of their own is no Christian at all.

Today, as we close our series, I felt it necessary to discuss how the bible defines the roles and responsibilities of the wife and the husband. Just as we did in week 2, this message could be seen as a description of the husband/wife agreement. There are principles in Scripture that help define the parameters of marriage, and like any contractual agreement, the responsibilities go both ways. Marriage is a partnership, not a dictatorship.

READ: Ephesians 5:21-33 (ESV)

²¹[\[Submit\]](#) to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, **submit** to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ 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.

²⁴ Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in **everything** to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, **love** your wives, as Christ loved the Church and **gave himself** up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should **love** their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

There are a couple of quick observations that need to be made before we dive into the body of the text itself.

First, before Paul even got into the respective roles of husbands and wives, and before he ever mentioned that wives should submit to their husbands, he admonished the Ephesian Church, as a whole, to submit to one another (cf. 5:21). In fact, that verse comes after a long string of characteristics that described what a healthy/functioning/harmonious church looks like. Paul's ideal Church is not only one which sings to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making a glorious melody together as they give thanks to God for all that He has done, but that model church also submits themselves to one another. Such characteristics have on the Church that the whole congregation is filled to bursting with the Spirit's power and presence. Thus, all that Paul has to say about the family comes from a desire to see the family live in harmony with one another and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Second, in conservative Baptist circles, much emphasis has been made over the years about how wives should submit to their husbands. Sadly, many men have abused and perverted this passage to force their own wives into some twisted form of indentured servitude. And even more sad is that there have been many preachers who have supported and perpetuated such a view. So much emphasis has been paid to how the wife should submit to the husband that it may come as a surprise that Paul had far more

to say to husbands than to wives. In fact, to be precise, Paul had 49 words for wives and 156 words for husbands. Meaning, Paul had three times as much to say to men as he does to women. This is best seen in the fact that Paul told husbands to love their wives three times in the passage, whereas he only tells wives to submit one time. What's more, when Paul says that wives are to submit to their husbands, he is not commanding them to obey.¹ Submission is not obedience in the same way that a democracy is not an autocracy. While marriage, as God designed it, puts the man as the head of the household, albeit only in a sacrificial sense, it is still a bond between two equal partners with equal voices. As such, husbands ought to lead with the consensus of their wives. And wives, of their own volition, ought to submit to their husbands.

Paul outlines the respective roles of the wife and husband.

i. Wives are to demonstrate submissive loyalty to their husbands.

One of the reasons why talking about how a wife should submit to their husbands is so controversial today is that today, the word "submit" has a dictatorial-tyrannical overtone. Almost as if Paul was commanding that wives should obey their husbands in the same way a subject should abide by the laws of their king. Yet, that is not how this word is meant to be understood.

Throughout the NT, the Greek word **ὑποτάσσω** (hoop-not-as'-so), here translated "submit," means to *willingly* defer to another's authority. For instance, people are to obey those who are in government authority (cf. Rom. 13:7); the employee is to abide by the directives of their employer (cf. Tit. 2:9); and we, as Christians, are to acknowledge God's authority in all things (cf. Rom. 8:7). This Greek word is in the middle passive voice, highlighting the wife's voluntary action to submit. Meaning, her submission is her choice and cannot and should ***not*** be compulsory.²

But notice, while that may still have a purely totalitarian feel to it, there is a reciprocal nature of service at the core of submission in each of those relationships (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15-16).³ While the people are to obey the laws of the land, the government is supposed to take care of the people's needs. While the employee is to abide by the directives of their employer, the employer is expected to give payment for services rendered. And while we all ought to

¹ Cohick (2020), p. 351.

² Hoehner, Harold W., *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2002), p. 732.

³ Thielman, Frank, *Ephesians*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2010), p. 373.

acknowledge God's authority in all things, only the unbeliever is unconvinced of how much God has given to us all. Thus, submission in the NT sense is never a top-down-dictatorial approach to authority, but one where all serve one another even though one party may hold a "higher" position (cf. Lu. 22:25-27).

Meaning, ladies, your husband is not king, he is not your employer, and he is not your god; instead, he is your lead partner. He is the one who has the responsibility to provide for you as he leads you and the family. And while, yes, he is undoubtedly the head of the household; and, yes, that position allots him a position of authority over you; the godly husband will use that power only to serve you and never to subjugate you. Meaning, the godly husband should never require, but he can request; he should never beckon his wife, but he can beseech his wife, and he should never command his wife, but he can hold counsel with his wife. When Paul talks about submission, he is talking about wives being supportive, not subservient.

What's more, Paul has two qualifiers on this submission.

a. Wives are to submit to their own husbands.

Contrary to many who would abuse this passage, God is not saying women should submit to men. However, he is saying that the wife should submit to their own husbands and no other. This flies in the face of how Aristotle thought of women as naturally inferior to men, a sentiment which sadly has taken hold in some circles today.⁴

b. Wives are to submit as if they were serving Christ.

Your husband does not have the same authority that Christ does (cf. Gal. 3:28-29). Even in marriage, a wife is complete through her attachment to Christ, not to a man. But when a woman submits to their husband, they're not really submitting to them; they're submitting to Christ. Marriage is an extension and commitment to the Lord. And how a wife submits to Christ will ultimately be judged just as the husband will be evaluated for how well they loved their wives.

Paul then gives reason to why wives should submit themselves to their husbands. "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." Gentlemen, you are head of your household in the sense that the head ought to sacrifice its well-being for the sake of the body. Just as Christ sacrificed himself for the Church, the husband sacrifices himself for the wife. "Headship" in the family is not "lordship," as if the

⁴ Thielman (2010), p. 375.

husband rules as an absolute monarch. To be the head of a Christian home is to be first to sacrifice all and be the first to serve all just as Christ has done for the Church.

Yes, this makes the husband the head of the household; but this also entails a responsibility on the husband's part to give all things for the betterment of his wife.

Ladies, you submit to your husbands because your husbands (should?) withhold nothing back for you. In fact, I'd say a wife who has a husband that imitates the self-sacrificial, nurturing, and supporting role of Christ would have no issue with submission to such a man as that.

ii. Husbands are to demonstrate sacrificial love for their wives.

Now, you would think that if Paul encouraged wives to submit to their husbands, he would, conversely, command that husbands should control their wives. But nowhere do we find this principle in Scripture. Yes, Paul encouraged the wives to submit to their husbands, but he does not reverse that mandate and tell husbands to subjugate their wives.⁵ Husbands are not meant to hold positions of authoritarian control and command over their brides; instead, husbands are supposed to hold positions of radical sacrifice and service for their brides. Paul even matches the sweeping nature of the wife to submit to the husband in *all things* with the husband being commanded to sacrifice *all things* for the sake of his wife. In this way, the husband actually submits themselves to their wives, a radical reversal of traditional social norms.

The word for love that Paul uses is **ἀγαπάω**. This love is an undeserving kind of love that takes no consideration for merit and is even shown to the undeserving.⁶ It is in the active, rather than passive, voice which highlights the ongoing process of this kind of love. This is the kind of self-giving love that God shows towards us (cf. Jn 3:16). Interestingly, nowhere in the Greco-Roman world, where one speaks about the love of family, do they use the word **ἀγαπάω**.⁷ It would've been thought of as far too radical a kind of love. That kind of love is only shown toward God and country, never toward family. This kind of love is especially not for the husband--who is "greater"--to show toward the wife--who is the "lesser." Gentlemen, love your own wives and no other.

You see, while this is perfectly normal in our modern-day setting, the idea that husbands should sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of his wife would've been utterly alien to the first

⁵ Cohick (2020), p. 349.

⁶ Hoehner (2002), p. 747.

⁷ Cohick (2020), p. 361.

century. Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Philo all proposed that the wife's duty was to support and better her husband's station in life, not the other way around.⁸ In fact, in a rare instance of seeming fairness, Plutarch encouraged women to learn philosophy. However, this progressive idea was quickly undercut when he explained that the reason behind such encouragement was so that the wife would be less irrational, thus making the wife a more pleasant companion for their husbands.⁹ Even when allowed to better themselves, the wife's interests and identity were always subservient to her husband's.

Going utterly contrary to the social trends of that day, Paul did not speak about the wife serving the husband but the husband serving the wife just as Christ served the Church. Paul points all husbands to the example of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the prototype of marriage itself. Just as Christ gave himself for us, the Church, which sanctified and cleansed us from our sins so that he might present us to himself without spot, blemish, or wrinkle, so too is the husband to give himself for his wife so that she will be well-taken care of. Just as Christ did not come to be served but serve, the husband serves his wife in all things (cf. Jn. 13).

Paul says that the husband does this because the wife is not simply under his care and sheer propriety would demand it, but it is because the wife is his own flesh and blood. Gentlemen, your wife is not an object to be used as you see fit; she is not a slave to do your bidding. Your wife is you—your own flesh—your hands, your head, and even your very own heart. She is you, and you are her, and together you are one. To use, abuse, and subdue her is to do so to your own flesh. As such, Paul says that husbands should nourish and cherish their brides in the same way that a person preserves and safeguards their own body. These two words describe how a husband is tasked with caring both physically and emotionally for their wives.

Paul says, "[This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.](#)" This means that marriage had always been intended to be representative of Christ's union with the Church. Even as far back as Gen 2, when marriage was instituted by God, God saw in the temporary bond between man and woman, the eternal bond between humanity and the Messiah. Marriage prefigured the Church *before* Christ and is now symbolic of the Church *after* Christ. And when marriage is ultimately done away with, the Church's bond with Christ will remain. This is why marriage only works when both parties make Christ their primary concern and their spouses their secondary concern because, someday, that marriage union will come to an end. In contrast, the church union has no end (cf. Mat. 22:30).

⁸ Cohick (2020), p. 342-348.

⁹ Cohick (2020), p. 347.

Paul then ends that by saying, "let each one of you love his wife as himself." The Greek is emphatic so that the effect is as if Paul was pointing a finger at each and every husband as he said this.¹⁰ Just as the wives were to submit to their own husbands, and not every male, so too is the husband to love their own wives, and not every female. The relationship between husband and wife is, first and foremost, exclusive.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Marriage is an exclusive and reciprocal partnership in pursuit of a relationship with Jesus and not a dictatorship. Thus, husbands and wives are to submit to each other and are to sacrifice for one another as unto Christ.

No wife who sees her husband's sacrificial love for her will have trouble submitting to him in all things. And no husband who sees his wife's submission to him will have difficulty sacrificing all things for her sake. Ladies, no other man should hold sway and influence over you other than your own husbands. Gentlemen, no other woman should have a place of importance and love in your heart than your own wife.

¹⁰ Thielman (2010), p. 390.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Marriage is an exclusive and reciprocal partnership in pursuit of a relationship with Jesus Christ and not a dictatorship. Thus, husbands and wives are to submit to each other and are to sacrifice for one another as unto the Lord. No wife who sees her husband's sacrificial love for her will have trouble submitting to him in all things. And no husband who sees his wife's submission to him will have difficulty sacrificing all things for her sake. Ladies, no other man should hold sway and influence over you other than your own husbands. Gentlemen, no other woman should have a place of importance and love in your heart than your own wife.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: