

# Ephesians

5:22-33

## Introduction

Most marriage problems are not really about your marriage. It's not your relationship with your *spouse* that is causing the problems, but your relationship with your *Savior*.

Paul begins this section on marriage in verse twenty-one where you read,

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another **in the fear of God**.

Marriage depends first and foremost on “the fear of the Lord.” The fear of the Lord is your response to God’s *love* and to God’s *life*:

1. The fear of the Lord is your response to God’s love. God loves you so much that He sent His Son to die as your Substitute and to be your Savior. You want to “keep yourself in the love of God,” and so you should fear *anything* and *everything* that would interrupt your experience of His love. You should be afraid of disappointing Him.
2. The fear of the Lord is your response to God’s life. Before you were saved, you were “dead in trespasses and sins.” Your life was on a path of destruction. Now God has “made you alive.” He has put you on a path to discover the “good works” that He has prepared for you from before the foundation of the earth. You respond with fear in the sense that you should be afraid of doing *anything* your own way. You should be afraid of deviating from God’s ways, as revealed in His Word, knowing that His ways are the ways of life.

What does the fear of the Lord have to do with your marriage? **It has everything to do with it!** When God addresses husbands and wives in our text He is not giving you marriage *counseling*. He is giving you marriage *commands*. All believers hear them. But not all believers heed them.

You will heed them as commands only if you fear the Lord. You will be afraid of disappointing the Savior Who loves you; and you will be afraid of deviating from His ways for your life.

With verse twenty-one as the foundation, we can look at wives and husbands in God's plan for marriage. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear Your Lord By Your Submission To Your Husband, and #2 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear Your Lord By Your Sacrifice For Your Wife.

#1 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear Your Lord  
By Your Submission To Your Husband  
(v21-24)

Before you object to the wife's submission let's read verse twenty-one again:

Ephesians 5:21 submitting **to one another** in the fear of God.

**All** believers, women **and** men, are to have an attitude of "submitting to one another." Marriage, family, and career are the three relationships discussed in the next verses in Ephesians. Each of them involves submission. In each case, Paul begins with the person or persons who are called upon to submit: "Wives, submit to your husbands..."; "Children, obey your parents..."; "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters..." Somewhere along the line, every believer is called upon to trust God's rules governing relationships by submitting to their roles and responsibilities in the fear of the Lord.

Paul begins with marriage because it is the foundation for all other relationships. He begins with wives since, in marriage, they are called upon to submit to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Let me get the qualifiers out of the way. You **do not** submit to sin. You **do not** submit to physical violence and abuse. You **do** submit right up to the point where obedience to your husband would involve disobedience to God.

The word for “submission” is from a root word meaning *order*. It doesn’t mean that you are to *obey orders!* It means that God has established the proper order for marriage. You and your husband are equal before God; but in your marriage, God has established an order.

In verse thirty-one Paul will take you back to the Garden of Eden. Adam was created first, then Eve. Adam was the *head*, and Eve the *helper*. This was God’s good and perfect order. If you fear the Lord, you will trust His order for the marriage relationship. Wives will humble themselves and accept the subordinate role as their husband’s helper.

The biblical teaching on marriage is not **chauvinism**; it is **creationism!** Since marriage is based on God’s original **creation**, it is not **cultural**. Attempts to redefine the rules of marriage, and to reassess the roles and responsibilities in marriage, are not *advances*. They are *attacks* on the essential foundation of human society.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

These verses are meant to encourage wives. Paul reminds both wives and husbands that they are each “subject to Christ” as the “head of the Church.” Submission to Jesus, and mutual submission to one another, is the new order of the household of faith. The fact that Jesus is “the Savior of the body” means that His rules for relationships flow from His love to give you abundant life. His rules for your particular household are for “wives [to] be subject to their own husbands in everything” because “the husband is head of the wife.” If you fear God you will follow His order for the operation of your home.

Why is it difficult for wives to submit? There are two primary reasons:

1. As a consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, women are born with a *fleshly* desire to rule over their husbands. Eve initially was content to be the helper; after the fall, her daughters covet headship.

2. The husband struggles against his flesh as well. Far too often the husband acts like a *fool* toward his wife, making submission unattractive to her.

Regardless your *flesh* and the *fool* you married, you are called upon to submit to your husband by fulfilling the subordinate role of helper. If you fear the Lord, you will do it. You'll be afraid of disappointing your Savior, or of deviating from His ways. If you won't submit, then you don't fear the Lord – no matter your arguments to the contrary. Your marriage problems are not with your spouse; they are with your Savior.

#2 You Show Whether Or Not You Fear Your Lord  
By Your Sacrifice For Your Wife  
(v25-33)

Ask any Christian about the roles of the wife and the husband and they will usually tell you that the wife is to submit to the authority of the husband because he is the leader of the home. While that may be true in some sense, I want you to notice that the word “authority” is never used in these verses; and the husband is never called the “leader.”

The word that *is* used is “head.” Paul began speaking to the husband in verse twenty-three, then got sidetracked with a few more comments to wives. The husband is “the head of the wife.” The wife is the helper of the head. The husband is to exercise authority and leadership of his wife the same way your head exercises authority and leadership over your physical body – doing what is best for it so it can help you move through life successfully.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Husbands should memorize the words, “Christ... loved the Church and gave Himself for her...” Jesus demonstrated His love by giving Himself for you. I substitute the word *sacrifice* for the word “gave,” because that is what Jesus did. He sacrificed Himself, even to the death on the Cross, to demonstrate His love. Husband – Jesus Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the Cross is the example of how you are to love your wife. He died for you; you die to yourself for her.

You are given two illustrations in the following verses: the *bride*, and the *body*.

Paul describes the concern for the bride in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven.

Ephesians 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,  
Ephesians 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

In the Jewish and Greek cultures of the first century, the bride would take a special bath, then get into her beautiful gown. She would be as clean and as beautiful as possible on her wedding day.

There is a lot of doctrine in these two verses, but they are primarily here as an illustration for us. Jesus looks upon you everyday and sees you bathed and in your wedding gown.

How do you look upon your wife? You should look upon her everyday as your bride – bathed and in her wedding gown. At a wedding, everyone works hard to keep the bride clean and beautiful. She is assisted in everything she does. She is on display for everyone to see. Look upon your wife as you should a bride and she will have no objections to taking her role as your helper.

The second illustration is the care of your body:

Ephesians 5:28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.  
Ephesians 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.

I think sometimes we make these verses more complicated than they are. Paul is simply saying that you take care of yourself. In fact, you go to great lengths to take care of yourself – to meet your needs and fulfill your desires. **You should apply the principle of caring for yourself to caring for your wife.** Remember, you are her head, *but she is your body!*

At this point Paul is done addressing husbands. The remaining verses are an important exhortation to both husbands and wives.

Before we look at them, let's summarize our thoughts regarding husbands.

You are the head of your wife and home. Headship is not what you normally think of in terms of authority and leadership. You are to make *any* and *every* sacrifice for your wife. You are to look upon her everyday as your bride, and live with her everyday as if she were your own body. You will do this if you fear your Lord – being afraid to disappoint Him, being afraid to deviate from His way of living.

If you won't exercise headship as it is presented, then you don't fear the Lord – no matter your arguments to the contrary. Your marriage problems are not with your spouse; they are with your Savior.

There is something else going on in your marriage. The relationship between you as husband and wife is an example to the world of Jesus Christ's love for His Church!

Ephesians 5:30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

People cannot see Jesus; He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. They can see **you**; **you** are His "flesh and bones" on the earth!

They especially see Jesus in the relationship between a believing husband and wife:

Ephesians 5:31 *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

This is, of course, a quote from the first wedding ceremony, performed by God in the Garden of Eden. God had just removed Adam's side to form Eve. Then God spoke of "two [becoming] one flesh." Paul says that this is in part a "mystery." A Bible mystery is something once *concealed* that is now being *revealed*.

What is here being revealed? Marriage is a picture of salvation in Jesus Christ, and of His great love for the human race.

Adam was put to sleep; Jesus Christ was put to death. Adam awoke from his sleep with a wound in his side. Jesus Christ awoke from

death in His resurrection - also with a wound in His side. On the cross at Calvary, Jesus Christ received a wound in His side as the Roman soldier in charge of His crucifixion pierced Him with a spear to make sure He was truly dead.

From the wound in Adam's side, God formed a bride. From the wound in Jesus' side a bride is formed. The New Testament calls Jesus the heavenly **Bridegroom**; those who trust Him for eternal life are called His **Bride**. They are all those who believe on Him for salvation - His Bride, taken out of His wounded side. Every wedding, and every marriage, should be an illustration of Jesus Christ's love for whosoever will believe in Him.

Your marriage **is** an illustration. What do you think people see being illustrated in your relationship?

## Conclusion

Paul concludes his talk on wives and husbands with a final, simple instruction:

Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects *her* husband.

**Head** and **helper** are all you need to know about marriage. You can read book after book on marriage, but this is what it always boils down to.

You show whether or not you fear the Lord in your *exercise* of headship, and in your *execution* of helping.

You might be discouraged in your marriage; but do you want to disappoint your Lord? He loves you.

You might be discouraged in your marriage; but do you want to deviate from your Lord's ways? He has given you life.

Your marriage is first about you and Jesus; only then is it about you and your spouse.