

Unconditional Respect

Ephesians 5:21-24, 31-33

As we continue to apply the gospel to every part of our lives, today we begin a two part series on marriage.

Last week we studied Ephesians 5:15-21 - the Spirit-Filled Church. The Holy Spirit transforms us completely - our speech, our hearts, our attitudes and our relationships. There is a caution there to beware of deception and distraction "because the days are evil." The command is to "be filled with the Holy Spirit." What is promised in Ephesians 3 is commanded in Ephesians 5. Believers WILL BE filled with the Spirit as we know, believe and experience the gospel. And believers MUST BE filled with the Spirit so we can live a life worthy of our calling.

Now we find what is called a Household Code **that exhorts husbands, parents and masters** to specific expectations. How does the gospel apply to marriage, parenting and work? Look at the sequence, starting in verse 18:

"Be filled with the Spirit... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives... Children, obey your parents... Fathers, do not provoke... Slaves, obey... Masters, do the same..." Ephesians 5:18, 21, 22, 25; 6:1, 4, 5, 9

The gospel applies to all of us - ***in whatever place in life we find ourselves***. The Spirit fills us to honor Jesus. We can do "all things through Christ who gives us strength."

Let me say a **word to those of you who are single**. Hear this - you are not LESS THAN or second class in the church. You are an equal sharer in the gospel, a full and valuable member of this church and The global church of Jesus Christ. Whether you are a lifelong single or find yourself single again, all of the gospel truth of Ephesians 1-3 applies to you - in Christ you are loved, saved and united. And all of the applications of Ephesians 4-6 are also relevant for you, in ***knowing how to pray for and encourage*** your brothers and sisters in the church who are married and do have children now.

All of us are called to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. ***It doesn't say "fill yourself up," it says BE filled***. We cannot fill ourselves but we can place ourselves before God so HE can

fill us. We cannot change ourselves but we can call on God to transform us more and more into the image of Christ.

So here is *the key command* in this passage:

The Command: Surrender all you are to Jesus

“Be filled with the Spirit...” Eph. 5:18

- Speaking worshipfully (speech)
- Singing passionately (heart)
- Living gratefully and (attitude)
- Loving submissively (relationships)

When the love of Jesus fills you and overflows through you it transforms your speech, your heart, your attitude and your relationships. We cannot change these things ourselves, it is only as we seek the Spirit’s filling, His guidance, His power and His fruit to grow in our lives that we will be steadily conformed to His image.

Husbands, hear this word. God calls YOU to be filled with the Spirit so the love and grace of God overflows in your words, from your heart, in your attitude and in your marriage.

- A man came to his pastor and said, ***“Pastor, my wife won’t submit to me!”*** The pastor said, “Oh. And why do you think she should?” The man had his Bible marked so he opened right to Ephesians 5, showing it to the pastor: “See, right here it says, “Wives, sub---”
- The pastor cut him off there. “Oh, I see the problem. What’s the first word there you just read?”
- “Wives, sub---”
- “Yeah, just the first word.” “WIVES.”
- “See, that passage wasn’t addressed to you. You’re trying to read someone else’s mail. Let’s go on to verse 25 - what does that say.”
- “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church...”
- “There we go. Let’s start there and talk about that.”

Today we hear ***God’s Word to Christian wives***. We are listening in on a private conversation. That is holy ground. Tread carefully. Use this information not to load your cannon for a fight later but to **PRAY for your wife** or the married women you know - and to appreciate the challenge God is calling her to.

Now let's all apply the gospel to our marriages. We'll see that Paul gives us a **WHAT a WHY and a HOW** in this exhortation to wives. What is a Christian wife called to do? Why? And How is she to do it?

First - the what:

WHAT - Submit to your husband

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord." Eph. 5:22

I realize this isn't a popular teaching in our culture today, but we are people of the Book - and this is what the Bible says. "Wives, submit." We are well beyond women's liberation and into the day of female empowerment. Paul is not at all calling for a return to ancient subjugation of women much less abuse of women in the home. But he is clearly presenting **the Biblical pattern of AUTHORITY and SUBMISSION**, which is how God designed it from the very beginning.

God made Adam first, then Eve. God gave Adam specific instructions to protect and provide for the Garden, including his wife. Eve was to listen to Adam and submit to his guidance. **Obviously they both failed.** Adam failed to lead. Eve failed to listen. Really, they both chose to listen to a talking snake instead of to God. But in the original creation, which was VERY GOOD, ***Adam was supposed to lead and Eve was supposed to follow.*** Adam was the protective authority, she was the responsive helper. Look at verse 23:

WHAT - Submit to your husband

"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." Eph. 5:23

The issue here is **HEADSHIP** - authority. ***What role does your head play in your body?*** It is the governing part, right? What your brain decides, your body executes. What do we call it when your brain tells the hand to move and it does not move? **Paralysis.** What do we call it when the brain tells the heart to beat and it doesn't? **Death.** If any part of the body does not respond to your head you consider that a serious **dysfunction**, don't you? You would see a doctor pretty quickly about it, wouldn't you? The teaching is clear, even if it isn't easy. Verse 24.

WHAT - Submit to your husband

“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” Eph. 5:24

Again, don't shoot the messenger. I didn't write the mail, I'm just the one reading it. Listen to God's Word. “Wives should submit **IN EVERYTHING** to their husbands.” You don't have to be a New Testament scholar to interpret the meaning of that verse. In what things should a wife submit?

- In areas of ***finance and business***; in the garage and out in the yard - in those areas wives should submit.
- ***In times you agree*** with your husband, when he makes a decision you consider a good one - then you should submit. Sure.
- But hold on. In EVERYTHING???
- The whole point of this teaching is that wives are called to submit even when they don't agree. ***If you only had to submit when you agreed it wouldn't be called submission it would be called AGREEMENT.***

Then the Bible would say, “Wives, submit to your husbands when they happen to be right.” Here is a definition of submission.

Submission: Placing yourself under your husband's authority with unconditional respect, responding to his direction and supporting his decisions

Let's look at each of these components of submission. First notice it's an issue of authority. To submit is to place yourself ***UNDER*** an authority.

- **The government is an authority** God has give us for our protection and blessing. Think of an authority as an umbrella of protection. If you stay under the umbrella, it shelters you from various dangers. The government provides an army, local law enforcement, the FBI, Homeland Security - all to protect us. If you follow the laws, you stay under the umbrella. If you rebel against the laws, you get fined or otherwise punished.
- **Parents are an authority structure** God has given us. If kids listen to and obey their parents, they will be safer. Your parents' instruction gives you protection if you stay under it. A child who runs away from his mom in a parking lot is running away from her protective umbrella and exposing himself to dangers he cannot see.
- **Your workplace** has an authority structure. Schools have authority structures. Churches do to. God has provided authorities to serve as umbrellas of protection over us and to administer blessings to us.

- Church membership is a formal placing of yourself under the protective and guiding authority of a church.
- And of course God Himself is the ultimate authority!

Wives, God has given you a husband as a protective authority - an umbrella to shield you from dangers in this world. If you were walking in the city at night wouldn't you be glad for your husband next to you? If you gave him the slip and raced down a dark alley wouldn't you be worried to be away from his protective influence?

Submission: Placing yourself under your husband's authority with unconditional respect, responding to his direction and supporting his decisions

“Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Eph. 5:33

This is the one verse summary of Christian marriage in the Bible. Husband, love your wife. Wife, RESPECT your husband. **Emerson Eggerichs** was a pastor, doing a lot of marriage counseling - seeing a growing crisis in Christian marriage. And as he helped couples apply this passage, a light bulb came on for him in this verse: a man need respect just as a woman needs love. Affection is oxygen to a woman's soul. Admiration is oxygen to a man. Cut off love for a woman and she struggles to breathe. Cut off respect for a man and he begins to panic. This sets up what Eggerichs calls ***The Crazy Cycle***.



Emerson and Sarah Eggerichs

www.rightnowmedia.org

“Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Eph. 5:33

When a woman feels unloved, she often reacts without respect. She can become irritable, critical, and start nagging. In an effort to get her husband’s attention and ask for LOVE, she finds herself ATTACKING her husband. And that does not usually produce in him much desire to love her.

When a man feels disrespected he tends not to react in loving ways. He will either shut down, going cold and silent or charge up, getting angry and mad. Either way, when a husband feels attacked, it is very hard for him to work up loving and affectionate words and actions for his wife.

Hence - ***the Crazy Cycle***. Marriages can spin in this cycle for days, months, even years. If you find your marriage in this place, PLEASE watch the Love and Respect conference on Right Now Media. Thousands of marriages have found help and healing in applying Ephesians 5:33! The goal is to get off the crazy cycle and start building the Rewarded Cycle:



There is a key word there on the sides: REGARDLESS. ***Every woman wants to be loved UNCONDITIONALLY***, don't you? No one wants a love that is conditioned on certain requirements. I'll love you as long as you look a certain way, weigh a certain amount, respond to me in specific patterns, serve me as I want... THEN I'll love you. That is TRANSACTIONAL love - and it isn't really love at all.

But the idea of **UNCONDITIONAL RESPECT** is very counter-cultural. In our world respect must be EARNED. And if you have not earned respect, we do not give it. Respect is always conditioned on behavior. You respect your boss to the extent that he leads you well. You respect a government official to the extent that he makes good and wise decisions. You respect your church leadership to the extent that we honor God and care well for the church family. If your boss, a public official or church leader is caught having an affair or cheating in their finances you would rightly lose respect for them, right?

So why should marriage be any different? The answer is that ***CHRISTIAN marriage should be totally different***. The Christian has all of her **need for LOVE** met by Jesus. We have been loved infinitely in Christ! The Christian has all of his **need for RESPECT** met by Jesus. We have been custom designed as God's own masterpiece. So we come to the marriage not needing ANYTHING from one another, and that positions us to SERVE - to truly give 100%, not needing, expecting or demanding anything from one another. And that one way, unconditional love and respect is a tremendously powerful force.

Wife, let's say you want your husband to help out around the house more. think of what is more motivating to your husband.

- You could keep nagging and nit-picking; keep criticizing and judging him. REACH FOR YOUR LIGHT SABER. Let me know how that works out for you.
- OR - you could **try unconditional respect for 30 days**. Total positive attitude. No judgment. No criticism. Nothing harsh. Nothing negative. All positive. Affirm. Appreciate. Respect. Admire. Don't be fake. Find real things you can acknowledge. Start small, if that's all you have to work with.
- If he does ANYTHING - anything at all - affirm it. Thank him. Appreciate him. See what happens. Put away the light saber and try the trophy.
- This is the Respect Dare.
- I dare you. Don't just try it for 30 minutes. Try it for 30 days. Commit to it. Be filled with the Spirit, calling on the Lord to help you. Make it your journey with Jesus for the next month.
- ***Commit to say and do NOTHING that communicates any disrespect.*** Even if you have to communicate something difficult, take the time to express it in a way that is not attacking or critical but is truly understanding, affirming and constructive.
- And commit every day to say or do one thing that communicates positive appreciation and admiration for your husband.
- I dare you. God dares you. Actually, God commands you.
- **The ultimate authority umbrella is God Himself.** When we obey His commands we come under His protection and blessing. When we refuse to obey His commands we expose ourselves to many dangers and problems. And this makes sense. God made us. He knows what is best for us. His commands are not to frustrate us. They are to bless us!

Respect is OXYGEN to a man's soul. Disrespect is like cutting off his oxygen supply. He can't think straight, much less come up with loving, affectionate words or actions for you.

Submission: Placing yourself under your husband's authority with unconditional respect, responding to his direction and supporting his decisions

"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." Eph. 5:24

This is **the WHAT of submission**. It means placing yourself UNDER your husband's authority - not resentfully, not begrudgingly, but gratefully, joyfully, in deep appreciation

for the protection and provision from God that he is to you - with unconditional respect; with respect for the God who gave you that husband, not for the man himself. You need unconditional love. ***Your husband NEEDS unconditional respect.***

And what verse 24 tells us - that wives should submit IN EVERYTHING, following the pattern of the church's relationship to Jesus, our head - is that submission means **RESPONDING** to your husband's requests and **SUPPORTING** his decisions.

What is the church's relationship to Jesus? When Jesus leads, we respond. When Jesus directs, we obey. Jesus is the head, we are His body. What the brain tells us we execute. It's really very simple.

Now, are there limits on this command? Of course.

- If your husband is telling you to **disobey God** or blaspheme Jesus... if he is leading you into an area of clear SIN, then your first obligation to GOD overrides your submission to your husband - in the same way our allegiance to local government is limited by our allegiance to Jesus first.
- And if your husband is **ABUSING you** - if you are in real danger, whether physically or emotionally - that's a different situation. That is not what Paul is addressing here.
- But if you are in a normal Christian marriage, with normal husband/wife disagreements and issues - then this is the blanket command. Wives, submit.
- Your husband initiates, you respond. Your husband decides, you support.

That is not to say the Christian wife is only silent and sits in the back seat and never speaks up, averting her eyes and bowing. The Christian wife lovingly and respectfully engages with her husband in a mutual relationship. She respectfully helps him think through decisions and see things he might not otherwise see.

Let's be sure we don't neuter this command with the cultural teaching of ***My Big Fat Greek Wedding***. "The man is the head but the woman is the neck." Ok, it's funny, and somewhat true. And we laugh. But the Christian wife's posture - her attitude and approach to her husband should be one of responding and supporting. That is the WHAT.

WHY?

WHY - Because God appointed him for you (and you for him)

“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” Eph. 5:21-22

Mutual submission is a standard mark of Christian community. All believers should submit our needs and desires to one another - and that certainly applies both directions in marriage. But there is a special command and calling for wives to submit just as we'll see next week there is a call for husbands to SACRIFICE. So mutual submission looks different. God designed it that way. Men and women are not the same. God designed some beautiful differences into us.

Wife, you submit to your husband **not because he deserves it**, not because he has earned it from you through his good behavior this week - but “out of reverence for CHRIST.” You submit to your husband “as to the Lord” himself. Think of how you want to treat Jesus, how you want to respond to Jesus - and that is how you should respond to your husband. Jesus planned this relationship for you - for your good and for your growth. We'll get into the husband's assignment next week, but here is a preview:

WHY - Because God appointed him for you (and you for him)

“As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her... so that he might present the church to himself... holy and without blemish...” Eph. 5:26-27

God appointed your husband for you - to protect and provide for you as your umbrella of authority - and to contribute to your **SANCTIFICATION**. This is what God is doing in our lives right now - He is cleansing us, purifying us, making us more holy, more like Him. We must cooperate with this process, submitting ourselves more and more to Him, putting off our old, earthly self and putting on the new self.

But think of this - on the day you die or Jesus comes back - this will be your reality and mine. **We will be the beautiful bride of Christ** - without spot or wrinkle, without a single blemish or sin, without any fear or guilt or shame - without any sadness or pain. We will be GLORIOUS.

God is preparing us - right now - for that moment. And the preparation process is painful. It is a chipping away of rough edges, a sanding off of blemishes. It has been well said that marriage is the sandpaper of the soul. If you want a thoughtful read on marriage, read Gary Thomas' book, *Sacred Marriage*.

“What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?”

Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*

This is precisely **the trap** that so many couples fall into - ***thinking that marriage is PRIMARILY about your happiness***. Does marriage make us happy? I hope so! Most of the time! But I think Thomas is on to something here. Ephesians 5 shows us there is a much bigger thing happening in marriage than just our happiness.

If you think it is your husband's job to make you happy, I guarantee you will both end up miserable. Husband, if you think it is your wife's job to make you happy, please come back next week to get your marching orders from Jesus! Notice in verses 26-27 Jesus is doing this work in ALL OF US!

WHY - Because God appointed him for you (and you for him)

“As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her... so that he might present the church to himself... holy and without blemish...” Eph. 5:26-27

Jesus gave up His life to **DECLARE us** righteous. And He continues to give us His life and power and love and joy so we can **BECOME righteous** in Him. We will not reach that perfection in this life, but we can and must make progress. And marriage is a big part of how God helps us make progress.

Hear that. Your husband is **God's custom sand paper** - His unique chisel - for YOUR sanctification. And you are God's custom chisel for him. So give thanks for the chiseling process because that is how we grow. It isn't fun, but that is our selfishness and pride, our laziness and greed steadily being chipped away!

What is the Christian wife called to do? Submit to your husband, as to the Lord. Why? ***It's about your relationship with JESUS not your relationship with your husband***. You submit to your husband because GOD gave that man to you. You trust Jesus. You obey Jesus. You respect and respond to your husband because you respect and respond to JESUS. HOW? That is our closing application.

HOW - By trusting in Jesus and experiencing His overflowing love

“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but **be filled with the Spirit, speaking... singing... giving thanks... submitting to one another...” Ephesians 5:18-21**

We come back to where we started today. This is the key command for the whole household code. First **the caution** - beware of deception and distraction! There is so much bad teaching and so many bad attitudes out there about marriage. Then **the command** - ***surrender all you are to Jesus!*** Let the Holy Spirit take over every part of your life - your speech, your heart, your attitude and your relationships.

Yes, submit even your marriage to the Lord. Don't lay your marriage on the altar and then take it back up again. Give it to Jesus. Entrust it to Him.

"Be filled with the Spirit." You cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit on your own. You need to walk closely with Jesus, abide in Him, trust in Him, experience His love - and then the fruit of the Spirit will grow in your life, more and more.

As the Holy Spirit fills you up, **you will overflow** with loving and respectful words; your heart will be filled with passion for Jesus; your attitude will be one of gratitude, not anger and discontentment; and your relationships will be marked by humble submission.

This is our verse for the month of May - it teaches us how to overflow:

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:17-19

How can you submit to your husband? Apply the gospel. Believe the truth of all that Jesus has done for you. Experience that gospel truth every day - and God promises that you WILL BE filled with all of His fullness. ***If you are fueled by the gospel and filled with the Spirit of God, ANYTHING is possible.*** You could walk into a war zone in Afghanistan or swim through shark infested waters with a deep leg wound. You can submit to your husband.

Let's pray for the filling of the Spirit to overflow in our marriages this week! Husbands, don't you dare skip next week after sitting through this one and taking detailed notes!

Let's pray.