

MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE LAST A LIFETIME!
EPHESIANS 5:22-31
SERMON

Last week I addressed the question, “What Makes a Christian Marriage, “Christian”? I based my answer on **Ephesians 5:21**, the verse immediately preceding the verses I read this morning. Before reviewing the answer to that question, let me remind the single folks in the congregation to use today’s message as you would a life jacket in a boat or raft. We wear life jackets just in case we need them. We never know when we might need them! But if we get thrown into the water, the life jacket sure comes in handy! This morning’s message on marriage might not apply to your situation *today* but you might need this knowledge someday. So, use it like a life jacket!

We learned last week that what makes a Christian marriage, “Christian” is the active presence of Christ in the marriage, maintaining a partnership and humility. In order to have a truly Christian marriage, Christ must be worshipped and acknowledged as Lord of the marriage relationship. He must be given the pre-eminent position by both the husband and wife. The husband and wife have personal devotional time, they pray together and attend worship together regularly. Both of them work and live as partners. They recognize they have differences but allow the difference to build the relationship rather than destroy it. They work at supplementing each other’s differences not competing with each other. The husband and wife humble themselves before God and each other. Christ serves as their example of humility. They avoid pride knowing it destroys marriages.

Today I want to investigate another question: *“how should we fulfill our God-given roles of husband and wife within the marriage partnership?”*

Before we wrestle with this question which has sparked tremendous controversy in recent years, several preliminary remarks must be made. First, let’s consider the lowly status of women in the first century. In their morning prayers, Jewish rabbis thanked God that God had not made them a “Gentile, a slave or a woman”. Most Jewish rabbis’ interpreted divorce laws liberally. Women had very limited rights in marriage. Further, a married woman had absolutely no rights in a divorce unless her husband was a leper, an apostate or one who engaged in some kind of disgusting trade.

The Greek’s view of women in the first century was even worse! Respectable Greek women led very secluded lives. Companionship and fellowship in marriage were simply unknown. The typical Greek husband expected his wife to run the home, care for his *legitimate* children and find her need for companionship elsewhere. In one Greek speech a man stated, *“we have harlots for pleasure, concubines for daily physical use, wives to bring us legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.”* *In Sparta, childlessness was grounds for divorce.* (Oepke, Albrecht, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume 1, pg, 778*)

In light of this historic context, the Apostle Paul did something very drastic in his teachings on marriage: he lifted up the status of women in marriage to new heights *never before* suggested! In spite of negative criticism by some modern feminists that Paul’s writings disparaged women, Paul’s writings actually *raised* the status of women in his day and they did so considerably! Both in Ephesians and Colossians Paul provided a radically new position regarding marriage. Paul sought to portray an ideal of a new fidelity, a new purity and a new fellowship within the covenant of marriage.

Paul viewed women not as sexual objects or chattel or even second class citizens. He viewed women as human beings, created in God's image. In Galatians Paul wrote, "**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus**". (Galatians 3:28)

So, with this historic background, let me return to the question I posed earlier: "*how should we fulfill our God-given roles of husband and wife within the marriage partnership?*"

1. Wives should submit to their husbands, "as to the Lord". Ephesians 5:22-24

In last week's message I defined the word, "submit". We learned that it was a military term that means, "to place oneself under". Though a military term, in nearly every case in the New Testament it refers to a *voluntary* submission. Jesus voluntarily submitted himself to God the Father and His plan of salvation. Jesus voluntarily went to the cross, took our sins upon himself and bled and died for them. He purchased our salvation!

Note that Paul does not call women to submit to men. Rather, Paul tackles the marriage relationship and the submission Paul commands is meant *only* for marriage. Paul states, "**Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**" Paul seeks a qualified submission for the wife. He writes that a wife's submission should be to their own husbands and "as to the Lord". In other words, Paul doesn't call wives to submit to every conceivable and crazy idea her husband imagines or does. For instance, wives should never submit to their husband's ungodly behavior which might hurt them. Wives should never, ever submit to physical beatings, verbal abuse or any other sinful behavior which would displease God.

In vs.23 Paul provides the reason for the wife's submission: "**For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior**". Notice the word, "head" as in the husband being the "head" of the wife. The word in the original text is *kephale*. It refers to both a person's physical head and the symbol of headship. Out of 72 uses in the New Testament, only 15 refer to the role of headship. According to one New Testament scholar, the word implies one who stands over another.

Let me clarify a glaring misunderstanding of headship. Many church leaders have stressed the idea that headship means leadership but they have failed to stress the servanthood role. Paul makes it clear in vs.23 that Christ functions both as Lord and Savior of the church. Note: "**Christ is head of the church, his body and is himself its Savior**". This means that in the marital relationship, the husband must provide both leadership and service for the wife. He follows Christ's model of leadership and service.

In the next verse, vs.24 Paul likens a wife's submission to their husband as the church's submission to Christ. Look at the verse: "**Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands**". So, how does this stack up with vs.22 where Paul told wives they should submit to their husbands, "**as to the Lord**"? Doesn't Paul argue for a *qualified* submission? But here in vs.24 he seems to argue for an unqualified submission. I believe that Paul simply provides an analogy in vs.24 of wives submitting to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. This should occur in every instance or situation in which "as to the Lord" applies.

What does submission of the wife look like, in practical terms? Consider a hypothetical couple named Jason and Jennifer McClatchy. They have been married for three years. They have a strong, solid, Christian marriage. Both of them have good jobs which they love very much. One day, Jason's boss informs him that the company wants to transfer Jason to Atlanta. The move involves a promotion to project manager. Jason asks for a week to pray over the possible move

and promotion and discuss it with his wife. He shares the news with his wife and they pray about it. They discuss the possible move in great depth. They struggle to discern God's will. They consider Jennifer's job, their families, and the new job possibility. They strive to make a joint decision. After considerable prayer, discussion and struggle, they finally decide to take the new position in Atlanta.

Though their decision was clearly a joint decision, it was made easier because of Jennifer's willingness to submit to her husband's spiritual leadership in the home. She trusts him. She knows he will strive to do what's best for their family. On his part, Jason's sympathetic with Jennifer's sacrifice. He knows that she loves her job and he decides to do everything he can to help her locate an attractive and challenging job when they relocate to Atlanta. He takes the time to really listen and care for his wife.

What about a couple in which the wife professes faith in Jesus Christ but her husband either doesn't have a faith or has a very nominal faith? How should the wife function in this kind of marriage/ Let's turn to **1 Peter 3:1-6** "**Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external- the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry or the clothing you wear- but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.**"

In this passage, Peter provides some directions for women whose husbands do not believe. Note his comments that a wife should have a "**gentle and quiet spirit**". Wives who wish to win their husbands to the Lord avoid being contentious, competitive, argumentative, rebellious, criticizing their husbands publicly and stubborn. Wives who want to win their husbands to the Lord communicate gentleness and love. I like Peter's comment stressing the inner beauty rather than fine clothes. Let's hear it for the "I hate shopping!" club!

The classic example of a wife who won her unbelieving husband to the Lord is St. Augustine's mother, Monica, who won her husband Patricius to the Lord. St. Augustine remembers his mother's gracious and gentle spirit in his classic book, **Confessions**.

Let's return to our Ephesian text in chapter 5:25. Paul writes next to husbands:

2.Husbands: love your wives as Christ loved the church. Eph 5:25-33

Paul has taken a brief paragraph calling wives to submit to their husbands. Now, in vs.25 he gives husbands instruction. He spends the next nine verses instructing husbands.

Note some immediate differences in the text. First, Paul spends a lot more time writing to the husbands! He takes nine verses to define the husband's role versus just three verses for the wife's role! Also, Paul repeats his basic command for husband's to love their wives. He writes this four times, in vs. **25, 28, 28** again and in vs.**33**. Paul only told women to submit to their husbands twice but he tells husbands four times to love their wives!! Why the difference? We don't know. Perhaps husband's need more reminders! Whatever the case, husbands must love their wives in a sacrificial manner!

A.Husbands must love their wives *sacrificially*. Look in vs.**25** "**Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**". Christ endured the cross and suffered, bled and died for the church. With Christ as our example, husbands must love our wives

unselfishly, completely, sacrificially! This means that we must be the protectors of our wives and family. We must defend them from any who would seek to inflict harm or evil upon them. We must be willing to give up our lives so they can live.

Loving our wives sacrificially means giving up selfish desires and putting their wishes ahead of our own. I shared with you several weeks ago how we spent a day shopping in Seattle that left me completely exhausted!

Husbands, we can love our wives sacrificially without having to sacrifice our lives! For instance, you can sacrifice a recreational outing with your buddies to take your wife out for her birthday. You can forego purchasing some new tools so she can update her wardrobe, you can sacrifice time away from work because you haven't taken your wife out in two months. Christ loved the church sacrificially and we must love our wives this way too!

B. Husbands, let your sacrificial love build your wife's spiritual life. (vs.26-27)

Christ's sacrificial death resulted in making the church holy and blameless. Christ lifted the church to new heights of holiness, purity and perfection. Husbands, we want our sacrificial love to encourage and stimulate our wives' spiritual lives so they will become holy and blameless in the sight of God. Someone once said, "loved people make better lovers". Husbands, love your wives in such a powerful and sacrificial way that your love frees them to be all that God wants them to be!

C. Husbands, let your sacrificial love for your wife be as strong as the love you have for your own body! (vs.28-33)

OK, guys, let's be honest! Most of us love our own bodies! O, we know we need to lose a few pounds here and there. We know that we don't have the physical strength and stamina that we had in college. But unlike most women's view of themselves, most men think they still look pretty good!

Paul knows men very well He knows that men love their bodies. So, he tells us to love our wives as we do our own bodies. Just as we care and feed our bodies, so we should care for our wives!

Husbands, do you let your wife know that you care for her? The best way you can do this is by spending time talking with your wife about your life, your feelings, joys and fears. For some of us, talking about our feelings can be a real challenge! But your wife wants, she yearns to know you! Your wife feels more cared for and loved when she knows you; when she's in touch with you.

We can also show our wives that we care for them by watching the kids when she wants to go out with a girlfriend, or when we do the laundry or the dishes or pay for them to have a pedicure or manicure. What practical things have you done recently to show your wife that you really *care* for her?

Here's the catcher: when you love your wife in a truly sacrificial way, like Christ loved the church, most wives would gladly submit to their husband's spiritual leadership in the home.

I'd like to close today with a service of prayer. You or a loved one or friend might need prayer support. This can be for anything, health, job, family issue, marriage, whatever! Could the elders please get up for prayer support. I have oil if you would like to be anointed with oil. Come on up for prayer!!