

God's Blueprint for Marriage

I. Wives, Submit to Your Husbands

II. Husbands, Love your Wives

*21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

*25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

*28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

In the pages of Holy Scripture, there are a lot of things that people have trouble accepting. Sometimes they just can't understand what the words mean. Other times, they understand exactly what the words mean, and they don't want to hear it. They take offense at it. Well, at the top of that list of offensive words in the Biel are the words recorded in our sermon text for the day. You probably already know what I'm talking about. It's the words of St Paul, “Wives, submit to your husbands.” Tell me, those words haven't stirred up a few people. And I don't just mean out in the world. I mean here in the church. Tell me that there hasn't been a time when you found yourself thinking, “Really? Wives have to submit to their husbands? How old-fashioned is that? That just doesn't sound right? It sounds sexist, chauvinistic, paternalist, and mean. Why would the Bible say something like that? It just doesn't sound like something that's going to bring people together. It sounds like something that's going to divide them.

If you've ever had thoughts like those, or been with people who were expressing thoughts like those, I'm glad you are here today. For today we're going to take a closer look at what Paul means (and doesn't mean) by the words, “Wives, submit.” We're going to see how that statement appropriately pairs with God's instructions for husbands and how both statements together, when viewed in the context of the relationship of Christ and his church, form the foundation for a God-pleasing, harmonious relationship between a husband and wife. Today we continue our sermon series, entitled “One Way to One.” In this case, we'll focus on the unity God creates in a marriage through the different roles he has ordained for husbands and wives. We might call it,

God's Blueprint for Marriage

It's simply this: I. Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.

And: II. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Let's start with the command which seems like it's the harder to fulfill. Isn't that right? If you had the choice to love your spouse or submit to your spouse, which would you choose? Which would be the easier to do? It seems like the bar that God sets for wives is a lot higher than the bar he sets for husbands. But in reality, that's not true. Let's see why.

We need to start with a word itself. Our text says, *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands*. Now, I think that for a lot of people, that word “submit” has a very negative connotation. To them it means, to buckle, to cave, to give in. It's what happens when someone twists your arm behind your back until you cry, “Uncle! I submit!” It means acknowledging that you are in

a position of weakness or inferiority.

But that's not what the Bible means by the word "submit." The word that Paul uses here is "Hypotasso." It's really a combination of 2 Greek words: Hypo, which means "under". And Tasso, which means "order". Under order. (Not Under Armour; Under order). In other words, to put things in order under something or under someone, in this case under someone who is in a position of authority. If we were speaking Greek today, we might use the word to describe what first graders are trained to do when the fire alarm goes off in their classroom. Rather than each one saying, "Me first! Me first! I'm most important!" and running out the door in fear and chaos and ending up with somebody getting hurt, they instead they are taught to "Hypotasso" their teacher. They line up behind the teacher. Is that because they are less important than their teacher? Or because they have no value in the eyes of the teacher? Not at all. Rather, for the sake of order, to protect these students, to care for them, they submit themselves to their teacher. They follow her lead. And of course that act of submission contains an element of trust, doesn't it? Those children are trusting that she's not going to lead them into the fire, but rather, lead them away from it. This then is what it means to submit. It means to recognize that we've been placed under the authority of someone who is in a position to care for us, protect us, and lead us in the way we need to go. That's why the Bible applies that word to the relationship between a wife and her husband.

Think about it. When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden he put them in a specific relationship. To Adam he gave the role of Head. To Eve, who was created from Adam and for Adam, he gave the role of Helper. Remember what God in Genesis 2:18? He said, "*I will make a helper suitable for him.*" Now, understand, that word "helper," is not a derogatory term. It doesn't imply weakness or inferiority. In fact, most of the time Scripture applies that term to God himself. God is our Helper. God supplies what we're missing. The point is this. When God calls the husband the Head and the wife the Helper, he's not saying that one is superior and one is inferior. He's not saying one is more important and one is less important. No, they are of equal value in God's eyes. But they are designed by God to carry out different roles. God has put the husband into a position of authority and he expects the husband to use that authority to serve the one entrusted to his care.

In fact, if a husband doesn't use that God-given authority properly, then God holds them accountable if they don't. Isn't that what happened with our first parents? When Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and then gave some to her husband, who the Bible says "was with her", who does God come looking for? God says, "Adam, where are you?" God is holding Adam accountable for not using the authority he had been given to say to his wife, in love, "Eve, don't eat the fruit!" But Adam failed to show loving leadership to his wife; Eve decided she wanted to be the boss and there have been problems in marriage ever since.

But just because sin caused Adam and Eve to abandon their God-given roles, that doesn't mean the roles themselves are bad. The roles are still designed by God to bring blessings into the lives of every married couple, even in a fallen world. The problem is, because we are all sinful human beings who by nature love ourselves more than anything else, because we don't want to serve or submit, we end up relinquishing our rules and thus sinning against God and each other. But you see, that's where Jesus comes into the picture.

You see, because God knows that every wife has a husband who is less than perfect, a husband was not always a selfless leader, a husband who can be downright dense (I know, because I can be one of those husbands), because God knows what husbands are really like, he connects a wife's submission to her husband to something much greater than her husband. He tells us that a wife's submission to her husband is really an expression of her submission to Christ. How does Paul put it? "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as you do to the Lord.*" Wives, do you realize what that

means? It means that there are going to be times when you don't feel like your husband deserves your respect. Times when he's not being the greatest head and at those times, you're going to need to look right past him and see Jesus. You're going to need to say, "Jesus, for your sake, I will show respect to my husband. For your sake, Jesus, I'm going to build my husband up. Because you are my real head, because I want to submit to your will for my life, I'll submit to God-given head you've placed over me."

In fact, here in our text, Paul draws a parallel between the Christian's attitude toward Christ and a wife's attitude toward her husband. Paul puts it this way: *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:24)*. In other words, just as a Christian is not coerced into calling Jesus our Lord, and we're not embarrassed to say that we are under his headship, so also a wife is not coerced or embarrassed to say that she's under the leadership of her husband. She knows that as a precious, gifted child of God, she's free to blossom under the umbrella of love and protection and yes, authority that God provides through her God-given husband.

But now I have to say, if it's important for us to see where Jesus fits in a wife's relationship to her husband, it's even more important to see where Jesus fits in a husband's relationship to his wife, which brings us to the second half of God's blueprint for marriage. It's simply this. II. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Did you know that St. Paul actually devotes more verses to the husband's role in marriage that he does the wife's role? Why do you think that is? Could that be because Paul recognizes that when a husband faithfully carries out his role, when a husband loves his wife unconditionally, as Christ loves each one of us...when a husband puts his love into action in his life, as Christ has done for us on a cross...when a husband sees himself not as the headmaster, but as the head servant, as Jesus did, when he got down on his hands and knees and washed his disciples' feet...When a husband faithfully carries out his role to love his life like Jesus loves her, then it becomes so much easier for a wife to carry out her role. So much easier for a wife to say, "If that's the way you're going to treat me...then I'm more than happy to let you be my head!"

But I believe there's another reason that Paul spends more time talking about the husband's role in a marriage. And that so that he can talk some more about the husband's role model. And that's Jesus. Look at what Paul says. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church*. And then Paul goes on to describe all the ways that Christ showed his love for the church, that is, for you and me. Paul says that *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. Why? *To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word*. There is an obvious reference to our baptism when God washed us clean in his eyes. For what purpose? *In order to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*.

Isn't that a beautiful picture? It's the picture of Jesus taking a bunch of filthy sinners like you and me, derelict dads, bossy moms, rebellious children and with his blood, he's made them all holy. He's washed them clean and dressed them in his righteousness. He made them all his beautiful, perfect Bride. My friends, you realize, that beautiful bride is you and me. We are the ones that are holy and blameless in God's eyes. In many ways, those are the most important words in this whole section, the most important part of God's blueprint for marriage. What God has done for husbands and wives—in Christ.

Yes, God still says "Wives, submit to your husbands." and God says, "Husbands, love your wives." If you think about it, both of those statements are expression of God's law. They tell us what God wants us to do. But they also serve as mirrors, revealing what you and I haven't done. As a husband, I have to confess, "I haven't shown my wife the love that Jesus has shown her." And wives must confess, "We haven't shown our husbands the respect that God demands." And the guilt and

shame, the disappointment and resentment those sins create can tear a marriage apart.

That's why it is so important, no matter how good or bad your marriage is, to keep going back to the Gospel. Confess your sins to God and each other. And then see yourself as God sees you in Christ. In Christ you are holy and blameless. You are beautiful in his eyes. Husbands, see your wife the same way. No matter what she looks like on the outside, God says she's beautiful. No flaws. No wrinkles. In God's eyes, she's absolutely radiant. Just the perfect bride. And now, out of all the people in the world, God has chosen you to be the one to love her, to cherish her, to lead and protect her just as Jesus has done for you.

And wives, believe it when God says that you are his beautiful bride. You don't have to compete for God's attention. You already have it. God is committed to you 100%. And really, it's that commitment that God is made to you that allows you to commit yourself to your husband, to entrust yourself to his care, to his leadership. Recognize him as a little reflection of Jesus in your life. The love and respect that you show your husband is just an expression of the love and respect you have for your heavenly bridegroom.

My friends, if you or someone you know still struggling with what your role in marriage is to be, here is my advice. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Jesus once said, "*The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve; and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45) May Jesus' sacrificial love for you, which has made you his beautiful bride, ever empower you and me to love and serve the one that God has entrusted to you in a marriage covenant with you, that God has designed to bring harmony and happiness in this life and give you a glimpse of what the heavenly wedding banquet will be like in the age to come. God keep us to that blessed end. Amen.