

Life Group Study Guide

Ephesians—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled: *The Marriage Sermon* and reflects on **Ephesians 5:22-33**.

Before you begin: Take some time as a group to *pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God's word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

Have someone from your group volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 5:22-33**:

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so 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.^[a] ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because 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." ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The Marriage Sermon

In our last study we saw that our submissiveness is a mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit (**v.21**): "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Christians say, like the Lord Jesus, "You first, not me" (cf. **Phil. 2:3; Mk 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; 1 Peter 5:5; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:19, 12:25; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; 1 Thess. 4:9, 5:11-15; Rom. 15:4-7; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11**).

That said, **verse 21**, "Submitting to *one another* out of reverence for Christ," shouldn't be used to flatten out everything Paul goes on to say about submission in our domestic relationships. Yes, all Christians are to submit to one another, but our submission clearly takes on different ways of serving each other. In **vv.22-6:9**, Paul applies this principle of submission to the variety of relational contexts we commonly find ourselves in; to marriage, the family, and the workplace.

Who has a healthy marriage? Who is instructing their children in the Lord? Who has a good reputation in their workplace? Is this how you typically identify Spirit-filled Christians?

1) The Spirit-Filled Wife (vv. 22-24)

You'll notice in **v. 22**: Paul writes, ²²*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*. Which does not mean wives are to equate their husbands with the Lord. It means that submission to their husbands is a duty that they owe to the Lord. The Christian wife has a Lord, and does not replace him with her husband, that would be idolatry. She is duty-bound to Christ first.

We know from the Scriptures both sexes are **equal**, both bear the image of God (**Gen. 1:27**), and both are equal in Christ (**Gal. 3:28**). So, the husband is not superior and the wife inferior or vice versa, they are equal, but it's an ordered equality. This reality is corroborated within the Holy Trinity. The Son is simultaneously equal with the Father and submissive to him. Equality of worth does not necessitate equality of role (cf. **Jn. 5:30, 6:38, 8:29; Matt. 26:39**) Discuss.

Verse 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."*

According to Paul, the reason for wifely submission is that the husband is the head of the wife.

David Helm writes, "The word "head" has a clear enough connotation in English, as in the head of a corporation, or head of a university, it carries the idea of authority and leadership attached to it, especially in this context where it's patterned after the analogy of Christ and the church."

Indeed, both husband and wife bear equal responsibilities, but he by his position stands in the way of greater judgement. He is the head. On him falls the care and protection of the family. He is the master of the house who exhorts, helps, comforts, and stands for it before God. When a husband makes difficult decisions, he should do so fearfully, and if he's wise, with the full counsel of his wife, and with humility and dependence upon God, realizing his fallibility and weakness.

Notice, **verse 23** makes the argument, Christ is the *Saviour* of the church, of which he is the head, and so it follows by analogy that the husband is to exercise his headship in the marriage with a Saviour-style servant-leadership; with a kind of love that is willing to die. Discuss.

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

None are called to follow this instruction into sin or irrationality or harm of any kind. "*We must obey God rather than men*" (**Acts 5:29**). Paul assumes we know that. Moreover, He is not calling the wife to slavish obedience. His appeal is to free, responsible people and is to be heeded voluntarily. This teaching is for Christians who want to live within their home as God intended. Still..."*in everything*"? Why is Paul so universal in his appeal?

Well, it's for this simple reason, that if you're not submissive to your husband in everything, you're not likely to be submissive to him in anything. The same is true of our relationship with Christ. If I am not submissive to Jesus Christ as Lord, and I treat him at the end of the day like a convenience *figure* head, I haven't really submitted to him. James Hudson Taylor said, "Christ is either Lord of all, or he is not Lord at all." Likewise, if a Christian wife only submits when she feels like it, then she's really just giving her husbands space to lead as long as it's convenient.

Wives, *just like* the attitude of the church is to submit to the authority of Jesus, and to yield to his leadership, so the inclination of your heart should be to follow the lead of your husband, to show him "*respect*", as it says later in **v.33**. Why? It's for the most glorious reason: **because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church!** That's the reason the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of submissiveness to your husband. It's so that your single friends and neighbours and most especially your children can point to your marriage and say, I understand something of what it means to be a Christian. It means to have a disposition toward Jesus like my Mommy's disposition toward my Daddy.

2) The Spirit-Filled Husband (vv. 25-33)

You'll notice if you're looking at your Bible's that Paul spends nearly three times as many words describing a husband's love as he spends describing a wife's submission. Why? Because the best argument for a wife's submission is a husband's love!

Verse 25: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*

A husband's love is to be a **sacrificial love**. No honest husband can hear or read these words and not feel the punch. Did you notice the way he puts it? "*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" Married men, what does your wife need most from you? She needs you! Discuss as a group what that looks like.

Secondly, we are to have a **sanctifying love** (vv. 26,27).

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.

Paul is speaking of the great goal the Lord Jesus had in coming and dying for us. We need to ask, is my wife more like Christ because she's married to me? Or is she like Christ in spite of me? Do I make it easier for her to serve and worship the God? Am I totally invested in her spiritual well being and in her utility to the Lord? The husband who loves his wife washes her in the Word. He sows the word of God over the soil of his wife's heart so the Holy Spirit can press it home and cause growth (**Rom. 10:17; John 17:17**). Discuss how husbands can practice this in their marriages.

Thirdly, Paul says, husbands are to love with a **self-love (vv. 28-30)**.

²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body.

A person does not have to be told to look after their own bodies. We do that by instinct. If you accidentally put your hand on the hot stove, you don't need to be told to remove it. You do that before any thought is formed – you do that reflexively. Husbands you need to love your wife that way. She needs to be first, after God of course (your wife is not an idol), but otherwise, first in your thoughts, and first in your concerns. When a decision has to be made, you're immediately thinking: "What outcome best serves my wife?" The Second Great Commandment of Matrimony is, "And you shall love your wife as yourself (cf. Lev. 19:18). And when you love her as yourself, you will be loving yourself because the two of you are one flesh.

We take time to nourish and cherish and love our bodies, and so also our wives. Why? because, Paul says, **Christ does this for his church, and we are his body!** That's the reason the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love in you for your wife. So that just as little Johnny can look at Mom's disposition toward Dad and know something of what it means to be a Christian in relation to the Lord Jesus, so he, can also look at Dad loving Mom, with a self-abandoning, self-forgetful, kind of love and know what it means, as a believer, to have Jesus set his love upon you. Wouldn't such a husband, warts, and eccentricities included, nevertheless be a husband to respect?

This is what the Spirit-Filled Marriage looks like. It's looks like the wife submitting to her husband as the church submits to Christ, and the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church. That's what Paul means in **vv. 31-32**: "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.

In Ephesians the word "mystery" always refers to something previously in shadow that has now being clearly revealed. It refers to revelation and illumination. Paul is saying that a Spirit filled marriage reveals/casts light upon - preaches the Gospel of Christ. Do you see that? All of this talk about how husbands should do this and how wives should do that – all of that talk is important, it really is – God wants you to be blessed and his ways are best – but even more than that, Paul says, I wanted to teach you about this because a Spirit-filled marriage PREACHES THE GOSPEL!! Your marriage is a sermon, a gospel sermon, about the love of Christ, and the churches happy submission to him. Very few people are going to hear that sermon, but all the people you love the most are going to hear it loud and clear.

Conclusion: Questions You may Have:

What if I'm in an abusive relationship?

Submission also does not mean that if a husband is unfaithful to you, you are left without Biblical recourse. It does not mean that if he abuses you physically or sexually or abandons you through incessant verbal humiliation, you must remain quietly in the home and accept the daily cruelty of that relationship at all costs. If you are experiencing abuse, or even just trying times in your marriage, speak to someone and get help. Talk to some trusted people who can help you to think clearly about your situation. To do that is always appropriate, honourable, Biblical and wise. The directive to display the gospel is not a call to suffer silently in an abusive relationship.

What if I'm a single parent? Are my kids doomed to perpetual and everlasting confusion surrounding the gospel?

We live in a fallen world and things are not as they were meant to be. We are all dealing with flawed marriages – flawed moms and dads who did not perfectly reflect the love of Christ for the church. Let's also recognize that for some the picture is not merely flawed, it is obliterated. There was no dad, or dad was a monster – what then? This is where we give thanks for the Holy Spirit. The truth is that no one is capable of seeing Jesus apart from the Spirit. Jesus said in **John 3** that we have to be born again by the Spirit to see the kingdom. That means for everyone – whether they had a good dad or a bad dad, a good mom or a bad mom, they need a miracle to see and believe the Gospel. Thankfully, no one's brokenness is bigger than God's miracles.

This is also where we can give thanks for the church. The church is a family of families so where your family is broken another family might be doing well. Single mom's, for example, trying to raise kids who have no idea what a good dad looks like and have never seen a man treat a woman with tenderness and sacrifice—need to expose their kids to families who do have that. It's a great reason to diversify your small group and include the children occasionally. Perhaps, someone could model what they do for family devotions at home, when you eat together as a group. This can be one of the ordinary ways that God does extraordinary work to restore families in the gospel.