

Ephesians 5:22-33
Loving Leadership
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A few years ago, I read the 1932 science fiction novel Brave New World, and I noticed the following statement by the book's author Aldous Huxley in the book's foreword:

"In a few years, no doubt, marriage licenses will be sold like dog licenses, good for a period of twelve months, with no law against changing dogs or keeping more than one animal at a time."

That statement was written over seventy years ago, and its prediction has certainly not come true. Marriage has not degenerated to the level of dog ownership. On the contrary, our appreciation for marriage has been enhanced in recent years.

To give a specific example of a new appreciation of marriage, Gloria Steinem, the co-founder of MS Magazine, back in the 1970s said, "a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle." Yet on September 3, 2001, Ms. Steinem got married. Apparently fish need bicycles after all.

Speaking more generally, we now know from statistical data that the married person lives longer and is healthier both physically and psychologically. We now know that children raised in two-parent families are six times less likely to have emotional and behavioral problems; less likely to drop out of school or to be

expelled from school; less likely to get pregnant as teenagers; less likely to use drugs; less likely to get in trouble with the law. Despite years of propaganda that a woman's only hope for fulfillment in life is a career, there is a growing trend for women to desire to spend more of their time as homemakers and mothers.

No, Mr. Huxley, more than a few years have passed since you made your statement, and a marriage license is still vastly more significant than a dog license. There really is no comparison between the two.

We want to continue today to examine how we can strengthen our marriages, how we can enhance our marriage relationship. As we saw in previous sermons, the most important factor in a strong marriage is the fear of the LORD because this is our strongest motivation to honor and keep our marriage vows.

Couples should enter into the marriage relationship with the understanding that this is a permanent relationship. I once saw a cartoon picturing a young lady showing off her engagement ring and saying: "My boyfriend leased it for two years with an option to buy." That is not a good attitude.

You might remember that when Cortez invaded Mexico and began his conquest of the Aztec empire, some in his party were tempted to turn back. Cortez solved this problem by burning all their ships so that they would have no choice but to go forward and finish the task they had begun. When we take our marriage vows, we should view that as burning our ships. We have no choice but to go forward with what we have begun. Apart from

our marriage partner's engaging in infidelity or deserting us, there is no going back. We must finish what we have begun. We are not going to give up the first time we have a disagreement or a disappointment. We are going to work through such problems because we have made a commitment before God to do so. And when we do that, by God's grace, the relationship improves over time. The high point of a marriage should not be the honeymoon. The best is yet to come.

This resolve to honor our marriage vows, a resolve rooted in our fear of God, is the most important key to a strong marriage. A close second is a couple's willingness to submit to the Biblically defined roles for husband and wife. These roles are most clearly defined in our Scripture reading for today. We looked at this passage in a previous sermon. If I might quickly review, the husband is responsible for loving his wife to the point of being willing to die for her. His role model for this is Christ, who died for the church. And sacrificial love is what the wife most needs and wants. This gives her the **sense of security** which means so much to her as the relationship-oriented creature made from a rib from Adam's side.

The wife is responsible for respecting her husband to the point of being willing to live for him. Her role model for this is the church, which lives for Christ. And submissive respect is what the husband needs and wants. This gives him the **sense of predictable order** which means so much to him as the task-oriented creature made from the dust of the earth.

That is what we have already learned in general from this passage. What I want to do today is to look in more detail at the

husband's role, and next week I want to look at more detail at the wife's role.

I want to look especially at Ephesians 5:23 which says that "the husband is head of the wife." What does that mean? What does that imply?

This title "the head" seems to suggest that the husband has some sort of authority over his wife. That is what the verse appears to be saying, but that idea is not very popular today. The world today believes that marriage should be a 50-50 partnership with neither party having any authority over the other. Some in the church have accepted this idea and teach that husbands and wives should have a mutual submission with neither having any authority over the other. By mutual submission, they mean being thoughtful and loving and considerate but without any sense of obedience to an authority. They quote Ephesians 5:21 which says that we are to submit to one another in the fear of God.

The problem with this is that the word translated submit in Ephesians 5:21 always implies a relationship of submission to some authority. This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of demons being subject to the disciples (Luke 10:17); citizens being subject to the civil magistrate (Rom. 13:1); servants being subject to masters (Titus 2:9); the universe being subject to Christ (Eph. 1:22); Christ being subject to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:28); church members being subject to the church elders (1 Peter 5:5); the church being subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24); and Christians being subject to God (Heb. 12:9). These are all one way relationships. None of these relationships are ever reversed. For example, the Bible never

speaks of the disciples being subject to demons or masters being subject to servants.

When Ephesians 5:21 says that Christians are to be subject to one another, this reminds us that Christians are to have a servant's attitude toward one another, even as Christ washed the disciples feet. To submit to one another in the fear of God is to obey Philippians 2:3, which says,

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

To submit to one another in the fear of God is to obey Romans 12:10, which says,

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

In this sense, every Christian has a limited general authority over every other Christian. But we must remember that the Bible also teaches that elders have a certain form of authority over the church, parents have a certain form of authority over their children, and the husband has a certain form of authority over his wife. The mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21 is not negating the authority a husband is given over his wife in Ephesians 5:23, which says, "the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church." We know that Christ's headship over the church involves authority.

Ephesians 1:22

And [God the Father] put all things under [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.

Within a healthy Christian marriage, the husband and wife will frequently consult with one another, seeking out each other's opinions and advice. Most decisions will be based on a consensus between the husband and the wife or on a voluntary agreement between the husband and the wife. Yet there are those occasions when the husband and wife cannot come to an agreement, and a decision needs to be made. In such cases, the husband has the authority to break the stalemate by having the final say.

This is what is meant by headship. The husband is head of the wife just as Christ is Head of the church. But notice that with the authority comes a grave responsibility. The husband is responsible to exercise this authority not selfishly but sacrificially, putting the genuine good of his wife first.

Our passage gives two examples of the sacrificial headship, one natural and one supernatural. Let's look first at the natural example. When a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh. And Paul compares the way a husband should treat his wife to the way a person treats his own body. Verse 29 says, "For no one ever hated his own flesh." I once heard someone use this verse to argue against dieting, but that is taking the words out of context. Paul points out that we nourish and cherish our bodies. To nourish is to provide needed food. To cherish in the most literal sense means to provide warmth, but the word is used metaphorically to refer to any sort of tender love and care. If our body is hungry, we feed it. If it is tired, we give it rest. If it is

dirty, we wash it. If it is cold, we warm it. If it is aching, we soothe it. We are sensitive to the needs of our body, and we seek to meet those needs. We should likewise be sensitive to the needs of our wives, and we should seek to meet them. And we should do this with consistency and constancy.

That is the natural example, but we also have the even more challenging supernatural example. We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Notice several things about Christ's love for the church. To begin with, it is a selfless love expressed through an unconditional choice. Christ did not choose the church because of its beauty. Our passage talks about spots, blemishes and wrinkles. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, while we were still sinners in rebellion against Him.

This is presented even more dramatically in Ezekiel 16 which speaks of Jehovah's choice of Israel as His bride. The passage says that God found Israel as a naked baby abandoned to lie in her own blood. The passage goes on to say,

- 8 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.
- 9 "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil.
- 10 "I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

- 11 "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck.
- 12 "And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.
- 13 "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty."

Jehovah loves Israel and Christ loves the church not because we were desirable or deserving but in spite of our spots and wrinkles and blemishes.

Christ loved the church unconditionally and sacrificially. He gave Himself for the Church, even to the point of dying the shameful and painful death of the cross.

And Christ loved the church constructively. He sanctifies and cleanses the church, transforming the church into a glorious body. Christ does not give the church everything the church asks for, but He does what is truly best for the church.

This is the husband's example. He should love His wife unconditionally.

Let's say that a man marries a woman, and then later meets another woman who seems more desirable for a life's partner in some way. What he needs to remember is that when he married his wife, he committed himself to love her with an unconditional love based on that choice. Unconditional. That means he should continue to give his special love and attention to his wife

without comparing her to other women whom he meets through the years. She shouldn't have to worry about his abandoning her at some point because he has found someone more desirable. In this sense, a husband's love should be unconditional.

A husband should love his wife unconditionally and sacrificially. Jesus made this statement about authority and His own example:

Mark 10:42-45

- 42 ... "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.
- 43 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.
- 44 "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.
- 45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus also gave us an example on the night of the Last Supper in the upper room when He laid aside His garment, girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet:

John 13:15-17

- 15 "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.
- 16 "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.
- 17 "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

And, of course, Jesus' greatest act of sacrificial service for the church was His death upon the cross:

Gal 3:13-14

- 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),
- 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Christ's love for the church was sacrificial love, and the husband is to love His wife sacrificially after the example of Christ's sacrificial love for the church.

A husband should love his wife unconditionally, sacrificially and constructively. The husband should be concerned about his wife's well-being. He should be concerned about her spiritual well-being, so he takes her to church and prays with and for her. He should be concerned about her emotional well-being, so he expresses his appreciation, love and commitment. He should be concerned about her physical well-being, her material well-being, and so on.

Men, if you will exercise this sort of Christ-like leadership, then your wives will not find it difficult to fulfill their role of respecting you and submitting to you.

Yet to live out an unconditional, sacrificial and constructive love patterned after the love of Christ for the church, that is an overwhelming obligation. There is only one way we husbands

can begin to fulfill this obligation, and that is through the power of Christ. Look to Christ, and He will make you Christ-like. Commune with Him, and He will transform you into His image and enable you to follow His example. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

Learn to trust Christ daily on a moment by moment basis. Pray to Him, worship Him, meditate upon His word. And He will progressively transform you into His own image. And you husbands will more and more be able to love your wives, just as Christ love the church and gave Himself for her.