

Ephesians 5:25-33
The Biblically Defined Roles in Marriage
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It was the wedding of the century! On July 29, 1981, Britain's Prince Charles married Lady Diana in a grand royal wedding. The city of London was dressed up like a vast stage for the occasion. Some 45 hundred pots of flowers lined the wedding route. An audience of 25 hundred crowded each other for pew space in St. Paul's Cathedral, and the estimated worldwide television audience was 750 million.

Prince Charles and Lady Diana certainly had a glamorous wedding. But, by the power of Christ and the grace of God, you can have something better, something that Prince Charles and Lady Diana never had, and that is a glorious marriage.

A glamorous wedding. A glorious marriage. Which of these two is the more important, the more precious, the more valuable? The answer is obvious. If there is any doubt, just think about the tragic experience of Prince Charles and Lady Diana after their glamorous wedding. The glorious marriage is by far the more valuable of the two.

And the issue before us today is the question of how we as Christians can have a glorious marriage.

The glorious marriage is something we as Christians should strive for. Obviously we should strive for this for the sake of our personal happiness and our personal well being. But there is a far more important reason, and that is the glory and honor of God. As our culture increasingly abandons Christianity, the family as an institution is deteriorating. In the midst of this growing darkness, we have an opportunity to shine forth as lights to the honor and glory of the God we serve. As divorce rates soar and as dysfunctional families become the norm, the glorious marriage sustained by the power of Christ stands out as never before. The message is,

This Jesus does save.

This gospel message is powerful.

There must be something to this church business.

We had better check it out.

Well, how do we shine forth with the light of a glorious marriage? The most basic requirement for a successful marriage is something I have already covered in past sermons, and that is the fear of God, a respect for God, an overwhelming concern about what God thinks of you. The fear of God is so vital because this is what motivates a couple to take their marriage vows seriously regardless of how they feel at the moment, regardless of whether the chemistry is still there in all its honeymoon potency, regardless of what difficulties or temptations they may be facing.

In the midst of all the turmoil of life, what remains constant are the wedding vows:

I take thee to be my wedded wife;
And I do promise and covenant
 before God and these witnesses
To be thy loving and faithful husband
In plenty and in want; In joy and in sorrow;
In sickness and in health; As long as we both shall live.

I take thee to be my wedded husband;
And I do promise and covenant
 before God and these witnesses
To be thy loving and faithful wife
In plenty and in want; In joy and in sorrow;
In sickness and in health; As long as we both shall live.

The foundation of a marriage is the seriousness with which a couple takes these solemn vows before God.

Years ago a glue company had an advertisement with a picture to illustrate the strength of their product. At the center of the picture were two blocks of wood that had been glued together. Attached to each block was a chain, and each chain was attached to a large horse. The picture showed the two horses straining in opposite directions, pulling the chains taut but unable to pull apart the two blocks of wood.

The husband is to cleave unto his wife. The glue that will hold a marriage together in spite of the powerful forces which pull against it is the fear of God, because the fear of God motivates us to honor our marriage vows regardless of all else.

I believe that is the most basic requirement for a glorious marriage, but a close second is a couple's willingness to submit to their Biblically defined roles as husband and wife. These roles are defined in our Scripture reading for today:

Ephesians 5:22

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

The first thing we are going to note about these roles is that they are **different by design**. The Biblically defined roles for the husband and the wife are not identical and they are not arbitrary. They are different by design. The husband and the wife are like a hammer and a pipe wrench, two tools designed for different tasks. You may be able to drive a nail with a pipe wrench, and you may be able to loosen a pipe with a hammer, but that is not what these tools were designed for, and that is not what they do best. God has designed the husband to be the loving leader in the marriage relationship, and God has designed the wife to be the respectful helper. That is what the husband and the wife were designed to be, and that is what they each do best.

Our text also defines the responsibilities which go with each role. As the loving leader, the husband's responsibility is to love his wife enough to die for her. His role model for this is Christ, who died for the church. As the respectful helper, the wife's responsibility is to respect her husband enough to live for him.

Her role model for this is the church, which lives for Christ. He is to love her enough to die for her, and she is to respect him enough to live for him.

Now these Biblically defined roles and responsibilities are not only different by design, they are also **suited to each other's needs.**

Again, the husband is responsible for loving his wife to the point of being willing to die for her. And sacrificial love is what the wife most needs and wants. A husband's sacrificial love 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.

Again, the wife is responsible for respecting her husband to the point of being willing to live for him. And submissive respect is what the husband needs and wants. A wife's submissive respect 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.

The wife needs love. The husband needs respect.

Several years ago, a book of lists was published which included a list of the ten problems Dear Abby hears the most. Number one on the list was "My wife doesn't understand me." Number two on the list was "My husband never gives me any money."

"My wife doesn't understand me." Why is that a problem? Because that is an indication of a lack of respect, and men want their wives to respect them.

"My husband doesn't give me any money." Why is that a problem? Because it indicates a lack of sacrificial love, and women want their husbands to love them sacrificially.

Husbands and wives were designed for their God given roles in marriage. These roles are suited to the needs of the other party. And the Biblically defined roles are **aimed at our weaknesses** due to indwelling sin.

The wife's responsibility is to submissively respect her husband. Yet how common it is for a group of women to get together and to talk despairingly, disrespectfully about their husbands: talking about how weak their husbands are, how flawed, how childish, how foolish, talking about how they, the wives, are really in control of the household, how they, the wives, have their husbands trained like a circus animal. And then they go their separate ways, return home and work to prepare their husbands' meals and to wash their clothes. Sacrificial love comes naturally to many women. It is the submissive respect they sometimes have trouble with.

The husband's responsibility is to love his wife sacrificially. Yet how common it is for husbands to expect their wives to do all the sacrificing. Ann Landers says that based on the mail she receives, 70% of the women who work outside the home still do 90% of the work around the house. Some men even refuse to

pick up their own clothes. Others go so far as to insist that their wives change the oil in the car and fix a tire when it is flat.

When a husband behaves selfishly toward his wife and does not love her sacrificially, how much harder that makes it for her to respectfully submit to his leadership. When a wife behaves disrespectfully toward her husband and will not submit to his leadership, how much harder that makes it for him to love her sacrificially.

Also, when a wife disrespects her husband's leadership and tries to take over that role herself, there are two common sinful reactions on the part of husbands: the apathetic husband and the abusive husband.

Adam's behavior at the time of the fall is an example of the apathetic husband. The evil serpent invaded their garden sanctuary, and Adam allowed Eve to confront him. Adam failed to shoulder the burden of leadership himself, and he left Eve in harm's way.

The language of the curse upon woman in Genesis 3:16 warns of the other common response, the abusive husband. God said to Eve, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." As we saw last week, the word rule here means to rule with coercive force.

The sin tendency of the wife is to disrespect her husband's leadership and to try to usurp his authority. The sin tendency of the husband is to respond selfishly with either apathy or abuse.

These sinful tendencies of husbands and wives can interact in a vicious vortex that can destroy the marriage relationship with a fury like unto that of a tornado.

Here is the problem. To have a glorious marriage, both the husband and the wife need to submit to their God-given roles in the marriage relationship. Wives need to obey Ephesians 5:22:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Husbands need to obey Ephesians 5:25:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Obedying these marriage commands goes against the very grain of our fallen nature. And we can't change ourselves any more than the leopard can change his spots. We can no more change our basic nature that we could persuade a tiger of the virtues of vegetarianism, because vegetarianism goes against a tiger's very nature. In our fallen state, it goes against a man's very nature to love his wife sacrificially. In our fallen state, it goes against a woman's very nature to submit to her husband respectfully. We can't change our very nature, but listen to 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

We can't change our nature, but Christ can. The moment you come to Christ, there is a definitive break with the past. Your sins are forgiven. The lordship of sin over your life is broken. There then begins a long process of spiritual growth. Increasingly, progressively, you die to sinful living. Increasingly, progressively, you come alive to righteous living.

For the husband, that means a new ability to obey Ephesians 5:25:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

For the wife, that means a new ability to obey Ephesians 5:22:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

And these new relational abilities in Christ can interact in a spiritual spiral which supports and empowers the glorious marriage. When he freely, spontaneously gives her sacrificial love, oh how that makes her want to give him submissive respect. And when she freely, spontaneously gives him submissive respect, oh how that makes him want to give her sacrificial love.

Charles and Diana had a glamorous wedding. By the power of Christ, you can have something far better: a glorious marriage.