

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

God is calling both husbands and wives to submit to each other. A wife must willingly place herself under her husband's authority. But what about the husband, how is he supposed to submit? God says that the husband is to show submission by loving his wife the way Christ loved His wife. But what does this mean; how is this submission and what's the purpose of it?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 5

Just as there's a new reality for Christian wives, there's also a new reality for Christian husbands. Yes, wives must submit to their husbands in everything, but husbands are to die for their wives in everything. That is, everything they do which affects their wives must be done with sacrificial love. God has come into all of our lives, which means that He's going to change the way we see and do everything, Ephesians 1-5. And when it comes to husbands, He has taken up residence inside them, Ephesians 2:5-6; 3:16-19, so that they will love the way He loves, Ephesians 5:2.

5:25, since we're dealing with mutual submission in marriage, how are husbands to submit to their wives? How does someone in authority submit to someone under their authority? God gives us the answer and the model husbands are to follow: God says to men, "Love your wives the way Jesus loved His wife and died for her." Therefore, men are to submit to their wives by showing sacrificial love for them. This means that they are to put their wife's needs and desires above their own. This is the sixth safeguard that God provides wives against a tyrannical husband. Essentially, God is telling husbands how they are to exercise the authority He gave them over the home and the model they're to follow: Jesus. How did Jesus see authority? He saw the one in authority as a servant of those under his authority (Matthew 20:20-28). The way Jesus cared, the way He provided, the way He protected, the way He led, that is how a husband is to exercise authority over his wife and family.

How is submission done by the husband? Through love: "Husbands, love your wives..." The way a husband submits is by loving his wife. But what does this mean exactly? In order to understand what this means we need to know what love is? The world defines love as a profoundly tender and passionate feeling, an overpowering emotion that makes you do crazy things, that turns the person you fell in love with into the most important thing on the planet. Is this what love is, a super-powerful emotion? If we ask God what love is, what's His answer? Scripture tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8), but God doesn't leave it there. In order for us to understand precisely what He means by "love," He personifies it. That is, God didn't give us a dictionary definition of love; He made it personal. His definition of love was written in flesh and blood. In the person of His Son Jesus Christ, God personified love. The God of the universe became flesh and blood, climbed onto a brutal Cross, and then died for us (1 John 4:9-10). That is what love is; it's a willingness to sacrifice your life, to sacrifice your interests, to sacrifice your all and all for someone else. That is submission and that is what God is calling husbands to do for their wives.

Therefore, love is not simply an overwhelming emotion; it's an overpowering emotion that is backed by a steadfast and selfless character. Without the selfless character, love is simply an emotion that is granite-like one minute but fickle the next. This is why when we look at the closest thing we have as a definition for love in God's Word, it can be summarized by one word: selfless (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a). This will be the measure of whether or not the husband is dying for his wife, whether or not he's submitting to her. Therefore, every time he does something that affects his wife, he should ask himself, "Is that loving my wife or me?" "Is that showing love for my wife or not?"

5:26-27, what was the purpose of Christ dying for His wife, of putting her interests above His own? It was so that He might remove any and every imperfection in her. Through His Word, the Lord cleanses us of all our impurities, all our sinful tendencies. Why does the Lord want to cleanse us like this now? Because pure holiness is our future destiny, Ephesians 1:4. Side note: This has nothing to do with water baptism because notice what cleanses: it's not the water; it's God's Word. Thus, one day Jesus is going to present us to Himself a glorious church who is holy and without blemish. That's why He wants to cleanse us now from our wrong view of everything. Think of what His Word does, it gives us the correct view of sin, of our status as God's children, of our ability to rule alongside Him, of His Spirit's role in our lives, of His power toward us, of His Son's role in our lives, Ephesians 1; of Satan's hold on us, of our salvation, of our intimate relationship with Him, of the tension between Jews and Gentiles, of His desire to live in us, Ephesians 2; of our right to partake of Israel's Messiah, of our ability to approach Him, of our access to His power, love, and constant indwelling presence, Ephesians 3; of our unity in and through Him, of our permanent connection to Jesus, of Jesus' protection and provision, of our new life and identity, of our new way of dealing with emotions, people and sin, Ephesians 4; of His Spirit's ability to turn us into spouses who bless each other and make each other better, Ephesians 5.

This is why Jesus died for His wife, but what is the purpose of a husband dying for his wife, of his sacrificial loving, his putting her interests above his own? It is the same. It is so that she will be the best wife she can be. He is there to ensure that whatever role in life God gave her, whether housewife or housewife CEO, he's there to make sure she succeeds. And this is the seventh safeguard for wives against their fears that their husbands will take advantage of them. That is, one of the key goals of the husband's authority over his wife, including the final say in everything, is to make her better. It is not there for his benefit but hers.

5:28-31, God gives husbands another incentive to sacrificially love their wives: it's to their own benefit. That is, the nature of marriage is that it does something to the two parties involved: it glues them together permanently. This is what happened between us and the Lord. Every individual who has believed in Christ has been permanently and forever united to Jesus Christ, Ephesians 2:5-6. We have His Spirit, love, and being, beating inside us, Ephesians 3:16-19. That's why God says we are "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" and the word for "member" means body part. That is why the Lord nourishes and cherishes us, Ephesians 4:15-16. To hammer the point home, God quotes the concluding verse from the passage of Scripture which describes the moment God created the institution of marriage, a verse that tells you exactly what marriage is: "one flesh," Genesis 2:24. Some see "one flesh" simply as a reference to sex, the wedding night when the married couple consummate their marriage. However, "one flesh" means a whole lot more than that. And that's what the apostle Paul is telling us in Ephesians 5. He's saying that once the couple gets married, they will be forever affected by each other, not just when they have sex.

That is why God tells the husband that he should love his wife as he loves his own body because she's now part of him. He tells him that he should nourish and cherish his wife because she is now his own flesh. This is the oneness of marriage, and here we have the final safeguard for the wife, i.e., the oneness of marriage will protect her from her husband wanting to abuse or mistreat her. Why? Because everything that he does to her will affect him; that is why when a husband mistreats his wife, it ruins his day too, not just his wife's. And this oneness of marriage runs in both directions: what happens to her affects him and what happens to him affects her. The more traumatic the event, the more their spouse feels it.

5:32, marriage is a mystery that has boggled the mind of many. To the world, marriage is either a prison or heaven on earth....for the first month; but after the honeymoon is over then comes trouble. How is it that two people can fall madly in love, believe that they can never live without each other, get married, and a year later they can't stand each other? That's the world's mystery when it comes to marriage. But this is to misunderstand what marriage is. The emotion of love will never sustain the difficulties of marriage. Once the emotion fades, all you're left with is two people who have different desires and different opinions about everything. When the two people don't understand that they've been glued together, that what one does affects the other, and that their job is not to ask, "What have you done for me lately?" but "How can I bring out the best in my spouse?", then the marriage will fail. However, when you look at how God designed marriage, how He can take two people and meld them together into one, how He can take two lives that are so different, two people with opinions so different and unite them into one beautiful whole where what one does makes the other better, it's amazing and mysterious. And as great as that mystery is, there's an even greater mystery: the oneness between Christ and the Church! How in the world can God unite infallible Deity with fallible humanity?! That's impossible, yet He did it. He is glued to us and we are glued to Him. And even though there are so many things wrong with us, even though we keep doing things that are wrong, His desire is to make us better and better. What a mystery!

5:33, God sums it all up: the husband must sacrificially love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband. Why did God word it this way? Why does He say that a wife must "respect" her husband instead of "submit" as He did in the beginning? He's telling us what each one of them needs: the woman craves and desires love and the man craves and desires respect. This is how God built us, so much so that it's biological, i.e., men have more testosterone than women, which makes them more aggressive and have a desire to conquer things. Woman have more estrogen which makes them more sensitive and emotional and have a desire for love and affection. It's not that men don't need love or women respect; they both need love and respect. But we're talking about their core desire, what they were built to crave. And this is why it's crucial that a husband always show his wife sacrificial love and why it's crucial that a wife always show her husband respect.

III. Conclusion

...submitting to one another in the fear of God.