

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

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA September 27, 2020

I. Introduction

The current state of matrimony is not good; some have sworn off marriage altogether as an outdated concept. It's no wonder in light of all the problems and divorce that take place—about half of all marriages end in divorce. People's experience tells them that it's impossible to have a long-lasting happy marriage. It may last for a while, but sooner or later it will fail. Is there any hope? God says "YES!" and husbands play a key role in this.

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

Chapter 5:18, 21-33

SUMMARY OF GOD'S WISDOM ON MARRIAGE: HUSBANDS

FIRST, if you want your marriage to succeed, you have to listen to God. You can get advice on marriage from a myriad of sources, self-help books, therapists, "experts," etc. But doesn't it make sense that if we want to know how something works, we should ask the person who invented it, the one who knows everything about it, all the ins and outs? When it comes to marriage, the One who created it is God (Genesis 2:18-24). He's the only One who can tell us what it is and how it works, 5:18, 21-33. God says that at its core, marriage is a oneness that involves submission: the husband and wife must both submit to each other, 5:21. But before God gives us our marching orders, He says that we must first submit to Him. In other words, we are not going to be able to submit to each other unless we first submit to God. The wife will not be able to nor want to place herself under her husband's authority and the husband will not want to place his interests second to hers. But if we give God control of our lives, regardless of what we think or what our experience taught us, if we let Him tell us what a wife is, what a husband is, and what marriage is, then He will enable wives to submit to husbands who don't deserve it and husbands to love wives who aren't lovable.

What God Says to Husbands:

God tells husbands to submit to their wives by loving them the way Jesus loved His wife. What's the husband's role? God clearly spells this out: he's to die for his wife in everything, 5:25-32, and to die means to love her the way Jesus loved us. Yes, he's the authority in the marriage, but he must see his authority the way Jesus saw His: the one in authority is a servant of those under his authority (Matthew 20:20-28). This means that his wife's interests, needs, and wellbeing come before his. His sacrificial love is also designed to ensure her spiritual growth. He's supposed to make sure that she becomes the best wife she can be, which blesses her and her family now and prepares her for when the Lord returns to receive us all as His Bride, 5:26-27. Thus, a husband's position of authority was given to him for her benefit not his. And since marriage is oneness, a permanent union between two people, 5:28-31 (Genesis 2:24), the husband is also to love his wife because everything he does to her affects him. Thus, as the Lord takes care of us because we're a permanent part of Him, 5:28-31, so husbands are supposed to take care of their wives. The husband was designed by God to fulfill the longing for love that God placed in the wife, 5:33.

Why does the husband have to die for the wife? This has to do with who God is which affected how He made us. God is several things at once: He's Leader, Provider, and Protector (Deuteronomy 1:30; 20:4; 29:5) but He's also nurturer. He's a Father and Husband (Isaiah 54:5; Hebrews 12:5-11), yet He also has motherly qualities (Isaiah 49:15). In this sense, although God is not female, He has masculine and feminine qualities. But there's also another very important aspect to God: submission. That is, in God there is both authority and submission. God the Father is the ultimate authority that God the Son and God the Holy Spirit always submit to (John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 4:6). And when He made us, He made us to reflect these various qualities, which is why He made a male and a female and not two of the same gender. His design was for man to reflect His masculine side and the woman his "feminine" side. This is why He gave the commands that He did in marriage and the church: in marriage, the male is to be the leader, provider, and protector, the husband and father, 5:22-31, and the woman is to place herself under that authority, 5:22-24. Likewise, in the church, the man is to hold the positions of leadership (1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:1) and the woman is to submit to that leadership. This doesn't mean that a woman can't lead, provide, or protect. She obviously can, as we see in the ideal wife of Proverbs 31. And since the man has been given the primary role of protector, he's the one who is supposed to confront any danger before his wife does. The man must also die because his dying is directly responsible for his wife's spiritual growth and success. This means that God holds him responsible when things go wrong with his wife or family. Finally, it's not just the husband who must die, the wife is also called to die: both must sacrifice their lives for each other, 5:21.

Why is it so difficult to die for my wife? One thing that keeps men from dying for their wives is the curse of Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Death, God told the woman that she would want to dominate her husband and He told the man that he would want to dominate his wife (Genesis 3:16). When men fail to control this desire to dominate their wives, the last thing they'll want to do is sacrifice for them. Instead, they'll think that their wives are there to cater to their needs not the other way around. Additionally, if you're a weak man, this will also keep you from dying for your wife: if you're tough physically but never learned how to take responsibility as a servant leader, then you'll abdicate your responsibility to your wife and you'll end up becoming a son instead of a husband. Likewise, if you're afraid of confrontation or speaking up for yourself, then you'll always give into or avoid disagreements with your wife. In a twisted sense, you'll be dying for your wife because you'll do everything she says, but inside you'll be thoroughly frustrated. Or if you were never taught to lead and you don't know how to handle your frustrations, when your wife begins to lead the family, you'll simply shut down. You want to say something but you know you can't because rage will take over. What's needed to combat weakness in men, regardless of the problem, is for them to learn how to be men, how to be leaders, providers, and protectors, how to exercise strength when the moment calls for it and how to show tenderness when appropriate.

What does dying mean, what does it look like in daily life? To die for your wife means to love her as Jesus loved His wife and died for her in order to make her the best wife she can be, 5:25-27. It is also loving her as you love yourself because she's part of you, 5:28-29. But love is not simply an emotion; it's an action (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a), so your wife should know that you love her, that you care about her **by your actions**. This means that you're willing to literally die for her, but also that you're willing to sacrifice your needs, interests and desires for hers. If she needs help around the house, you help her. If the kids are driving her nuts, you take over and give her a break. If God gave her the talent and ability to be a business woman, you support her. At every turn, you look for ways to sacrifice yourself for her. However, dying sometimes involves not giving her what she wants. The question is, "Will it harm her, you or your family?" If it's something bad, then it's time for you to protect her and speak up. Remember, your job is to ensure that she's the best wife she can be for her benefit now and her future glory as part of the church, 5:26-27.

Submitting to your wife doesn't mean giving her the authority. The question is, "Who's leading the marriage?" If your wife is clearly the one who sets the agenda for the family and you act more like an assistant, i.e., she's in control of all major decisions, you have to ask or check with your wife before making any decision, etc., then you may think that you're dying for your wife, but what's actually happened is that the roles have switched. And again, leading doesn't mean making decisions regardless of those under your responsibility and authority. You must lead like Jesus did; you consider their needs before your own. And as husband, you work together with your wife because you're incomplete without her. She's the helpmate who will help you see things you can't, which will help you avoid foolish or sinful decisions (Genesis 2:18; 21:8-12).

How do you die for/submit to a rebellious wife? The question is, "Who's the problem, you or her?" Is she submitting to you, but you're failing to love and lead? Find out the problem and fix it.

1. *Your command to die doesn't come with a condition.* Neither of God's commands to the wife or husband comes with a condition. We must obey them regardless of whether or not our spouse obeys their command.
2. *You're supposed to ~~force~~ love her into submission.* Even if your wife refuses to submit to you, even then you're not supposed to force her into submission. The submission must *willingly* come from her, 5:22-24. This means that it's on you to create an atmosphere that makes her **want to** submit. What kind of husband are you? Whose needs do you care about the most, yours or hers?
3. *A wife will follow a Christ-like husband.* Your demeanor towards your wife will affect her submission. If you're like Jesus, she will follow. You're supposed to care about her more than yourself. You're not supposed to rule over her, but love her into submission. You don't ignore her concerns. You always have her best interest in mind even if it means having a difficult conversation with her. You'll be there for her, even if you had a bad day, even if you were tired, even if, even if, even if. If you behave like Jesus as God is telling you, 5:25-32, then your wife will want to submit to your leadership.

4. Godly submission begets godly submission. God made humans to react to kindness, i.e., when someone is kind to you, it makes you want to be kind back. And when that kindness is someone dying for you, putting your interests before their own, it makes you want to do it for them. This is why when you love your wife sacrificially or when you respect your husband unconditionally, it makes your spouse want to die for you. This is what fixes all problems in marriages, even marriages headed for divorce.
5. What if my wife holds past mistakes against me and thus refuses to submit? If you don't know how to lead your family, then you need to have a mature, godly man mentor you in how to lead your family. If you're no longer making those mistakes and she's still holding them against you, then forgiveness hasn't happened. What you have is a band-aid on a gaping wound. You need to actually go through the steps of forgiveness: repentance, confession, ask for forgiveness, forgiveness is given and received, and restitution is made (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15; Luke 17:3; 1 John 1:9). If the problem is with your wife, then you need to help her see her failure. But make sure she knows you love her, that you're doing this to eliminate something that is damaging to her, you, and your family.
6. What if my wife is a strong woman with her own ideas and refuses to submit? Make sure that you're not part of the problem. Are you domineering or weak? If you're failing to lead properly, to love her as Christ loved the church, then you need to fix this. If the problem is with her because no one ever showed her how to be a strong godly woman, then help her fix this, 5:26-27. If she won't hear it from you, then find a mature, godly brother or sister in the church who can show her how. She must know that you're not trying to subjugate her, but that you're helping her escape Satan's idea of a strong woman.
7. I'm afraid to lead my wife for fear of rejection, criticism, or disagreement. You're the husband. It's your job not to be afraid. If you are afraid, turn to the Lord for courage and wisdom (Psalm 56:11; Proverbs 3:5-6). If you're a bad leader, learn how to be a good, loving leader. Also, learn how to deal with the rejection: if it's your failure, fix it. If it's hers, help her overcome it. If her criticism or disagreement is correct, then accept it realizing that God sent her to help you (Genesis 2:18). If you've always struggled with rejection or criticism, then there's a deeper problem. Find a mature, godly man or woman who will help you overcome it. You need the Lord to free you from the real reason behind your fears.
8. Do I still have to die for her if she refuses to submit to me? Yes. There are NO conditions on your command to die. However, if your dying is feeding bad behavior, if she sees your dying as weak and, therefore, she refuses to submit even more, then stop. You don't want to feed bad behavior. There are times to keep dying for rebellious wives as there are for rebellious husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2); the Lord uses this dying to turn the rebellious spouse around. But as the Lord addresses our sins, the husband must also address his wife's sin of rebellion. If she won't accept it from you, then reach out to a brother or sister who can reach her. Meanwhile, keep dying for her, but not in a way that feeds her rebellion. Ask the Lord to intervene with conviction.

How can love and authority go hand in hand? At first glance, love and authority don't seem to go hand-in-hand. Also, the idea that men should be the final authority in the home seems like going backwards to an era where women were treated as second class citizens. The question is, "What does God mean by authority?" and "What do we *think* He means?"

What does God mean by authority? The word “authority” doesn’t appear in 5:22-24; however, authority is present in every verse: wives are to submit “as to the Lord,” “the husband is head of the wife,” wives are to be subject to their own husbands “*in everything*,” and the original Greek word for “submit” means to bring someone under the firm control of someone else but it’s stated in the passive, i.e., wives are to willingly place themselves under the authority of their husbands. And how does God define authority in this context? If man was the one demanding wives to submit to their husbands, then we have something to worry about. But we’re talking about God, the One who suffered and died to rescue us. When He tells wives to submit, He’s not doing it to oppress them. We know this because He tells the husband to exercise that authority as His Son did over His wife and died for her.

Having authority over your wife and kids doesn’t mean tyrannical rule. A popular idea when it comes to authority in marriage is 50/50, i.e., the husband and wife both have equal power. But sooner or later this will run into a stale mate; they’ll both believe they have the right answer and someone has to make a decision and break the tie. God’s idea is this: the husband has final authority in everything, but he’s never to exercise that authority without considering his wife. Done God’s way there is care, concern, love and sacrifice, 5:25-29. The Lord demands that your husband treat you the way Jesus treats His wife. So tyrannical rule is the farthest thing from what God is calling for in marriage.

In God, authority and love are never divorced from each other. God has many attributes. He’s all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, all-love, etc., but He’s all these things at the same time. Therefore, His authority over us is never divorced from His love for us. We clearly see this in His discipline for us (Hebrews 12:6). And when husbands allow God’s Spirit to control them, 5:18, they too will be able to manifest authority that’s undergirded by love. His Spirit will keep them from tyranny or abuse.

Do you have oneness or a roommate? Sometimes marriages drift into and become a roommate relationship. This is not marriage. Marriage is oneness, not living separate lives. There’s supposed to be intimacy spiritually, emotionally, and physically. If your marriage has become a roommate relationship, you need to fix this. You need to love her sacrificially and she needs to respect you unconditionally.

Oneness of marriage in busy lives. Sometimes the business of life separates you from your spouse. You must not allow this to happen because this again destroys the oneness of marriage. Make a commitment to spend time together; be in each other’s lives spiritually, emotionally, and physically. You both have something the other needs, so don’t let Satan steal it from you.

III. Conclusion

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