



"Never marry unless you can do so into a family that will enable your children to feel proud of both sides of the house."

—Robert E. Lee

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## Marriage—A God-Plane Relationship (Part Five)

As Part Four illustrated, a chief purpose of marriage and family is to teach proper, godly government. It provides a conducive environment to learn both how to submit to authority and how to oversee others in [love](#). Even in the "marriage chapter," Ephesians 5, Paul makes frequent use of governmental terms (italicized below) to describe the ideal marriage relationship:

Wives, *submit* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is *head* of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is *subject* to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, *love* your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ([Ephesians 5:22-29](#))

*Submit* is a governmental term, as the governed person surrenders, gives in, or yields to the one who is in authority, and the apostle later uses *subject* in the same way. Paul employs the word *head* to denote one who has authority over an institution, just as the head directs the body. In God's scheme, the husband has authority over his wife and family in a similar way to Christ's authority over His Bride, the church. Again, we see the physical/spiritual parallel.

Perhaps the most significant governmental term in the whole passage is *love*. To many, love and government seem like odd companions, for most governments do not practice love but sheer, unfeeling power. But God's government is different. Love—outgoing concern for everyone and everything—is the very basis of His government and way of life. Paul illustrates this by pointing out that [Jesus Christ](#) governs His church in love, giving us examples of how His love is manifested to us: by sacrificing, sanctifying, cleansing, glorifying, nourishing, and cherishing it. The apostle turns these into instructions to the person in authority—the head, the husband—on how he must work to produce a happy, successful marriage.

Throughout this passage, he emphasizes the fact that the marriage union has a greater purpose, and a major one is to teach and practice proper governance. He stresses the authority and the loving care of Christ, the Head, as well as the submission and eventual glory of the church. In the husband's role, authority is finely balanced by loving care, and in the wife's role, her present submission is compensated by her ultimate glorification.

Many people think of government negatively, but good government offsets its use of power with an appropriate amount of love, combined with humility, and the promise of reward or blessing. These elements do not always take place at the same time, but this mix of virtues will eventually produce some form of glory, that is, a wonderful, magnificent result. In the case of marriage, it should produce enduring, harmonious, loving mates; happy, productive children; and sterling, righteous character in all parties involved.

These days, authority is disrespected and maligned, and Paul—actually, the whole Bible—teaches that this should not be. [God](#) is the ultimate authority,

and He gives it to governments, institutions, and men as He sees fit ([Romans 13:1-7](#); see [Daniel 4:17](#)). Those so endowed are responsible for wielding their power justly and fairly, balancing it with [kindness](#) and concern. In the church, especially, we should have a better and more proper understanding of how government should work. Sometimes authority is not always used properly even in the church—yet in some of these cases, we make such a judgment because our perspective is skewed by various factors. A patient person will often find that it produces good fruit in the end.

Paul continues his teaching in [Ephesians 5:30-32](#):

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.  
"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Just as Jesus reached back to God's instruction to Adam and Eve in His teaching about marriage in Matthew 19, the apostle similarly refers to [Genesis 2:24](#), when Eve is first presented to Adam. This verse, often called the "leave and cleave" verse, reveals that there should be a definite break between one's life as a child and life as an adult spouse. To put it another way, a man's life *under* his father and mother should be completely separate from his new life in which he is *over* his own household.

According to this verse, the newly married couple should set up a house on their own because to do otherwise confuses the roles and responsibilities that God desires to work on through this relationship. If a man remains under his father and mother, he cannot be the lord of his own manor, as it were; he cannot really be a head to his wife. In the same way, if the couple lives in her parent's home, the wife has divided loyalties. Who is really her head: her husband or her father?

For the marriage to work best, the couple should not remain in the home of either set of parents because it does not allow for the intended relationship between husband and wife. It is one thing if there is some sort of hardship that forces the couple to live with the parents for a short time, but to fulfill God's command and purpose in [Genesis 2:24](#), a newly married couple should set up their own household as soon as practicable.

A man should be king of his own castle and his wife, his queen without interference from parents or in-laws. The parents can be there to give needed advice, to lend a hand, and to watch the children from time to time, but for the couple to grow and develop the character that they need both now and for God's Kingdom, they *should* be on their own.

This means that, barring other complications, a couple should not marry if they are unable or not mature enough to set up a separate household. They should put off marriage until the husband can support his wife financially and emotionally. Paul does say in [I Corinthians 7:9](#), that if a man and woman cannot control themselves, "it is better to marry than to burn with passion." However, that piece of advice has frequently been abused by people who are unwilling to practice self-control—a sign that one or both of them is indeed immature.

Next time, we will delve further into God's instruction in [Genesis 2:24](#).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Most people have an ambivalent attitude toward government, on one hand fearing it as an evil instrument to deprive rights and on the other hand an instrument for social progress. God intended government to be a positive force of bringing order out of chaos, keeping on a straight course, educating, edifying, and to give laws which ensure an entity (family, organization, or country) does not become extinct. Governmental leaders from governor to judge to head of the family have the awesome responsibility to instill the proper fear of God and His commandments, giving instructions on the process of attaining abundant life (Deuteronomy 30:11-16).

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by David F. Maas

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