

## Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 12)

Unity

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Given 05-Feb-11; Sermon #1031

The happiness of the whole of society depends on a right perspective of the marriage relationship. It is true the world over, that the views that prevail in regard to this relationship, determine everything in reference to all other relationships of life, and to all other sources of enjoyment.

No good can come out of the violation of the original design of marriage as a vital covenantal and essential foundational societal pattern. As God designed it, the wife should occupy a subordinate but comparable place in its organization to the husband. She should never neglect the God-ordained duty that she owes to her own husband and children.

Her humble execution of her responsibilities includes the willing attitude so that the moment she ascertains what her husband wants is the moment she does what is to be done.

A husband should never force or expect anything that would not be perfectly proper for a wife to deliver. Also, he should consult her desires; and when he understands what they are, he should regard what she prefers as the very thing he would call for.

The known desire and preference of a wife, unless there is something wrong in it, should be allowed to influence his mind, and be what he directs in the family. This is an essential part of marital unity.

A husband will love his wife appropriately and superbly, provided his love is submissive to the love of God. The command is to love her as Christ loved the church.

What Christ endured in order to redeem the church, should be what a husband is willing to deny himself to promote the happiness of his wife; to watch over her in sickness, and, if need be, to risk health and life to promote her welfare.

He should remember that she has a special claim of justice on him, because she left her father and mother's home; forsook the friends of her youth; endowed him with whatever property she had; sunk her name into his; opened her heart, her honor, her character, and her happiness to him. So, the least that he can do for her is to love her and try hard to make her happy.

This was what she asked when she consented to become his; and a husband's love is what she still asks to sustain and cheer her in the trials of life.

There is great guilt in those husbands who withhold their affections from their wives, and forsake those to whom they had solemnly pledged themselves at the altar; those who neglect to provide for their needs or to care for them in sickness; and those who become the victims of overindulgence and leave their wives to tears.

There is horrible guilt of this kind on earth. There are millions of broken vows. There are countless hearts made to bleed.

There is many a pure and virtuous woman who was once the object of tender affection, now, by no fault of hers, forsaken, abused, broken-hearted, by the brutal conduct of a husband. Please do not let this happen in your marriage!

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

In this twelfth and last sermon on marriage, I am going to focus on the essential central principle of unity; and I want to look at the principle regarding wives respecting their husband.

Let us reread our pivotal passage concerning this found in Ephesians 5.

**Ephesians 5:17-33** Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. 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

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does the church. 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. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

We now come to our final consideration of this important and essential paragraph. The apostle Paul is dealing primarily with the responsibilities of husbands towards their wives, though in the last verse, we notice, he again reverts to the responsibilities of wives toward their husbands, so that he can present the truth concerning marriage as a whole; and in a complete and balanced form.

In applying all this we have seen that the most important thing is to understand the spiritual principles concerning Christ and the Church. The Christian, of all people, should be one who thinks and reasons, who uses his mind.

The great act of the renewing of our minds—of being born from above—is the operation of God, but the moment we receive the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, we are able to think and to reason and to use our understanding.

So, all these New Testament Epistles are addressed to the understanding. At the beginning of this Epistle, Paul prayed, “That the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened,” by the Holy Spirit. So, we have found that what Paul does here is to set out this vital doctrine of Christ and the Church and then say, “Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ.”

There are some practical points that must be dealt with in order for this explanation to be balanced. There are certain practical guiding principles or rulings that Paul gives here, and they are all related to this wonderful analogy that he uses.

## **UNITY IN THE CHURCH**

The first great vital principle is—unity! What we have to understand is the essential unity between husband and wife—these two shall be made (or become) one flesh. This unity is comparable to the unity between a man and his own body, and also to the spiritual union between Christ and the Church.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk

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worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Peace is a state of reconciliation and love and therefore it acts as a bond to unite believers in Christ. Members of God's Church do not create unity, but are to keep it—to preserve the unity already established. This spiritual unity in the Church should carry over to unity in the Christian marriage.

Stated negatively: if a professing Christian is not unified with Christ, as His Bride—God's Church—how can that professing Christian be unified in his own earthly marriage?

**Ephesians 4:4-6** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Since the Church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the Head, and we are an essential part of that body, we are entitled to say, as it relates to the Church, that what is true of Him is true of us.

There were already troubles concerning a right understanding of the nature of the Church by the time the apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians. Paul's reason for writing his First Epistle to the Corinthians was that there were divisions, sects, and schisms in that congregation.

In effect, what Paul said to them is that all their troubles stem from their failure to understand clearly the nature of the Church. They were thinking of themselves still in a separatist manner, as individuals, and had formed themselves into little groups of individuals. The result was that some marriages and families were dysfunctional—disunified!

If they had seen the idea of the Church as a whole, as a united body, individualism would have been unthinkable.

In verses 4-6, Paul plays on the word one—one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

He continually repeats the word *one*, and thereby establishes this principle of the essential unity of the Church. It is not a matter of whether the Church is unified or not, because the Church having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is always unified.

The question to ask is, “Are you unified with the Church? Do you agree with the body of Christ?” The question is not, “Does Church doctrine agree with your human traditions and personal preferences?”

The statement in verses 4-6 is interesting from many standpoints, including what we may call the mechanics of interpretation, because the word *one* occurs seven times. So there is the suggestion of perfection, in addition to oneness.

The apostle Paul also repeats the word *all*—“One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.” This again emphasizes the same idea of unity and inclusiveness.

People, who have different pursuits, and different objects of ultimate affection, can be expected to have no unity between them. People, who have multiple allegiances, cannot hope to be united. Their desires are directed to different objects, and they have no common feeling of harmony or sympathy.

But where there is one supreme object of attachment, there will very likely be unity. The children of a family that are devoted to a parent will be united among themselves; and husband and wife, father and mother, who are devoted to the One True Supreme God, will be united among themselves. And the fact that all Christians have the same great object of worship should constitute a strong bond of union among themselves and unity with Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, who does what His Father commands.

The apostle Paul does not handle the doctrine of church unity by a personal appeal to us to be kind, patient, and good. These qualities are essential, but the fundamental principle is that we should see ourselves as members of the Church, and see the Church as a reflection on earth of the oneness of God’s Family.

We have been called into a spiritual body. The Church of God is one body of one Spirit no matter where its separate congregations may be found throughout the world. This is concerned with “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The unity is already there; it is inevitable. The translation in the KJV and the NKJV of Ephesians 4:4 brings this truth out clearly by saying, “There is one body.” The words, *there is*, are supplied by the translators; they are not in the original. The translators very

rightly supplied them.

In other words they remind us that the apostle Paul is not appealing to us to form the unity; what he is telling us is that this unity is already there, and that all he is asking of us is not to break it— to endeavor to keep it, to guard it, to safeguard it.

Paul is not making some great appeal to us to come together. He is urging us to be careful not to break the unity in any way or to not be the cause of any kind of rupture or of division or of separation.

What does Paul mean by referring to the Church as *one body*? This is a very important question. Of course, Paul is referring to the invisible, spiritual church, not to any physical man-made organization. God's work is not limited by a corporation established by men.

Paul cannot be referring to a physical, visible man-made organization because the external church consists of many bodies in the church, a multiplicity of bodies. Paul is thinking of the essential spiritual church of God, the body of Christ. This leads to the conclusion that there is only one true spiritual church of God.

There is one perfect spiritual church of God. There is only one body. This Church consists of people of all types and kinds and colors, from many continents and climates. But these varieties make no difference to this invisible spiritual Church.

We can be members of a visible physical church group and, sadly, not be members of God's spiritual Church. Membership of a visible "church" may be as useless as circumcision was in the days of the early church. The thing that matters is that we are truly in this invisible, spiritual Church of God which alone is the body of Christ.

## **Unity in Marriage**

The unity of a man and his own body and the unity between a husband and wife are physical types of the spiritual union between Christ and His Bride—the Church.

Unity is the central principle in marriage; and it is because so many people in this present society have never had any conception of what is involved in marriage from the perspective of unity, that they are holding it so loosely and breaking their vows and promises, so much so that divorce has become one of the major problems of this age.

They have never really experienced this unity; they still think in terms of their individuality, and so you have two people asserting their rights, and therefore you get

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clashes and conflict and separation. Paul says the answer to all that is to understand this great principle of the body and unity.

Paul worked that out in terms of the body, but then he puts it very explicitly by reminding us again of what is said in Genesis 2 in connection with the making of Eve out of Adam, that Adam might have a helper comparable to him.

The moment God made Eve, in order that the man and the woman could enter into this married state, the statement was made that a man should leave father and mother and should be joined to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

Paul quotes the same words in Ephesians 5:31—"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 command that is given to the man who is becoming a husband. He has to leave his father and mother. Why does he have to do this? Why is he commanded to do this? Because of this new unity that is coming into being between him and his wife. "For this reason" says the apostle Paul. What is that reason or cause? He told us in Ephesians 5:30, "For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

That is the relationship of the husband and wife, and because of that—for this reason—a man must leave his father and mother in order that he may be joined to his wife.

This is an extremely important point. It is, in a way, the final proof of the unity that exists in the true marriage, and it is an external indication of the unity. In other words, Paul is saying that when a man gets married he enters into a new unity that breaks former relationships.

He is no longer to be bound and held by the former relationships because he is entering into a new and into a more intimate relationship of unity. Until he got married the man's chief loyalty was to his father and mother; but that is no longer the case; he now has to leave his father and mother and enter into this new relationship.

That is a life-changing statement, especially in view of the fact that there is so much teaching in the Scriptures about the relationship of parents and children. The family is the fundamental unit in life, and so Paul will go on in the next chapter to say, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right."

But that statement must be taken in the light of this, that when a man gets married he is

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no longer a child in that sense. He leaves his father and mother; he is now entering into a new unity. He comes out of where he was so that he can enter into this new unity, this new relationship. He is now the head of a new unit, the head of a new family.

It is very often at this point that acute tensions tend to arise and difficulties occur in the married relationship. Obviously in all these matters the biblical statements must be taken in their context and with reason. We must never become pharisaical about these things.

Take this statement about a man leaving his father and mother. That does not mean, obviously, that he should never have anything to do with them again. The term is *let him leave*, so we must consider the meaning of *to leave*.

It is a very practical matter, of course, but the important thing is the spiritual understanding of what is involved. Sometimes this is treated in a pharisaical way and people become harsh and almost unkind to the father and the mother.

That is not the apostle Paul's teaching; but he is concerned about the principle. In practice it means that this man has to regard himself from here on out, not primarily as a child of his parents, but as the husband of his wife.

All his life he has been regarding himself as the child of his parents and rightly so. "Honor your father and mother" is one of the Ten Commandments. But now he has to make a great mental adjustment; he has to think matters through, to assume new responsibilities and to begin to live in a new way.

He is no longer in a position of subservience; upon marrying, he now has become the head of a new family. He now must regard himself in this way, and he must behave himself in this way.

The leaving of the father and mother in reality means that he must not allow his father and mother to control him as they have always done prior to this point. This is the point at which difficulties arise.

For 20, 25 or maybe even 30 years that former relationship has been in existence—father and mother and child. It has become a habit, and we think instinctively along those lines. But now this man is married.

It is difficult for him, and perhaps even more difficult for his father and mother, to realize the new situation that has come into being; but the teaching here is that the man must

leave his father and mother that he may be joined to his wife.

He has to assert and to safeguard his new status, and defend it against any interference on the part of his parents. And in his own behavior, he must no longer act simply and only as he did before, because he is now joined to his wife. He is no longer what he was before.

He is what he was before, PLUS. That plus creates the difference between the old and the new relationship.

That is the meaning of this expression, "leave his father and mother;" he has to assert the new position that has come into being as the result of his marriage. And, of course, when we look at it from the standpoint of the father and mother the situation should be equally clear.

They must re-adjust themselves even as their son does. They have to realize that their son's first loyalty now is to his wife. He will be a very poor specimen of manhood, a very poor husband, and ultimately, a very poor son if he fails to show that loyalty. They must not interfere in his new married life. This in no way relieves the son of his obligation to honor his father and mother.

They have always commanded their son in the past in various ways, and it was right that they did this. But now it is inappropriate; they have to recognize that something entirely new has emerged, and that they must not think of their son any longer simply as their son.

He is now married, a new unity has been created, and whatever they do to him they do to his wife at the same time. So obviously they cannot treat him as they treated him formerly. All that is included in this idea of a man leaving his father and mother so that he can become joined to his wife.

It is really the essence of the apostle Paul's teaching about marriage that all parties involved have to realize that a new unity has come into being. It was not there before, but it is there now. The new husband has to realize that he is not what he was; the new wife has to realize that she is also not what she was in her relationship to her parents.

The parents on both sides have to realize that they are not what they were before. Everything is different. There has to be a re-adjustment all along the line because of the new unity that has come into existence as the result of a marriage.

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“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” According to biblical teaching there is nothing more drastic that can happen than this double action—leaving and joining.

The family is the fundamental unit of our earthly life, yet though the man is still the son of his parents, and though, of course, he still belongs in that general sense to his family, the important thing about him is that he is now the head of a new family and must be treated with the dignity that corresponds to the new status.

The moment we realize this, marriage becomes one of the most momentous things that ever happens in life. For that reason, when we are at a marriage service we should realize that this new unity is coming into being, and that we have to re-adjust our thinking, and from then on, think of the bride and the bridegroom in this new relationship.

This new married state now has precedence over every other human relationship. A man leaves his father and mother; so does his wife; and it is as this principle is comprehended and put into operation that you get the ideal married state that is outlined here, and you see the difference between Christian and non-Christian marriage.

The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is that the Christian always knows WHY he does a thing; he always knows WHAT he is doing. The Christian is “not unwise, but understanding in what the will of the Lord is.”

That, then, is the first practical command that the apostle Paul gives us.

The second vital principle is, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself,” found in Ephesians 5:33.

In a sense, we have already dealt with the point that Paul is making, as we were dealing with the man in his relationship to his body and in regard to his thoughts about his wife. The best comment on the matter is found in Colossians 3:19.

**Colossians 3:19** Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

The negative here helps us to understand the positive in Ephesians 5:33. The great danger, obviously, is for the husband to domineer. The emphasis is upon the fact that he is the head, he is the leader, and he is in the position of responsibility.

That is how God established it at the beginning. So the danger always confronting the man is to be bitter, which means to be harsh. The antidote is found in Ephesians 5:33, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself.”

You are not harsh to yourself, therefore, do not be harsh to your wife, do not be heavy-handed; do not be dictatorial.

Christian marriage is an illustration of the biblical teaching about love; it is what you find in I Corinthians 13 being put into practice in the married relationship. It was introduced in Ephesians 5:18, which is the key to it all.

**Ephesians 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

If you are filled with the Spirit, you will be different in every relationship. Paul is giving us one illustration of it—the home. That is the place where it should be seen if anywhere; that is the place to judge a man and a woman—in the home—what they are there.

It should be seen in your home that you are filled with the Spirit, so that anybody who comes to visit you will receive a true witness of God’s way of life.

There is no greater recommendation to the truth and power of God’s way of life than a husband and wife, in a Christian marriage and in a Christian home.

Remember, then, the second great principle given to the husband. He is given this position of dignity and of leadership and of control; and if he understands what it means, he will never abuse it, he will never misuse it, by being harsh or dictatorial or unkind or unfair.

To be guilty of such behavior is a denial of the marriage principle and means that there is an absence of the Spirit. But let us look at the other side.

## **Respect**

The third great principle is, “And let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Paul used a very insightful word here. It is translated *reverence* in the KJV and *respect* in the NKJV; but the word really means *fear*. “And let the wife see that she fears her husband.”

But we must remember that there are different types of fear. There is fear, as John reminds us in I John 4:18, "Fear involves torment." That is not the fear that Paul talks about in Ephesians 5:33; he speaks of reverential, respectful fear.

What it really means is deference, with reverential submission. Here, again, is an idea that Paul introduced earlier when he was dealing with wives. He says in Ephesians 5,

**Ephesians 5:22-24** 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.

Paul comes back to it again in verse 33, "And let the wife see that she respects [treats] her husband [with due deference, with reverential submission]."

Perhaps the best commentary on this is found in I Peter 3, where Peter is in his own way dealing with exactly the same subject. Peter goes back to the great example and pattern of this teaching. He puts it in this form:

**I Peter 3:1** Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands [the idea of deference] that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives.

In order to impress this upon the wives, Peter proceeds to say,

**I Peter 3:5-6** For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

So the wife is to treat her husband with deference; in other words, she is to recognize this biblical view of marriage, she is to regard her husband as her head, the head of this new unit.

They are both one, but there is a head to the unit, as there is a head to our body, as Christ is the Head of the Church. Since the husband is head, the wife is to treat him with

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the deference that is appropriate of one who realizes that relationship.

So what it means for the wife is that the deference that she formerly paid primarily to her parents, she is now to pay to her husband. That is the meaning of the command in Psalm 45.

**Psalm 45:6-11** Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia; out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. Kings' daughters are among Your honorable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him.

This is talking about the glories of the Messiah and His Bride; this is the level of reverence that the King's Bride—the Bride of Christ—is to give Him. It is addressed prophetically to God's Church; this is what she is to do spiritually (described in biblical imagery) when she becomes joined to her heavenly Bridegroom; but it is also applicable to the case of the wife in the marriage relationship—"Forget your own people also and your father's house."

As the husband is commanded to leave his father and mother, the wife is to forget her own people and her father's house. Now we have to use common sense here in interpreting words such as these.

She is not to forget in an absolute sense, but she is to forget in this sense that she is no longer to be controlled by her parents. The man is not to be controlled by his parents, and the wife is not to be controlled by her parents.

It may occur to someone to ask the question, "Why, in connection with the plain teaching about marriage, are we told that the man is to leave his father and mother and to be joined to his wife, while there is no corresponding statement about the woman either in Genesis 2 or in Ephesians 5?"

The answer is quite simple. The woman is always in this position of paying deference. The man was in that position until he got married; but from that point onwards he

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becomes the head. The woman pays deference to her parents; she gets married, and now she pays deference to her husband.

She is always in the position of paying deference, she is never the head. But the man who formerly was a child and a son and paid deference now becomes the head and receives this deference from his wife.

There is nothing as fatal to a marriage as that either partner is paying deference to a third party. In so doing they are breaking the unity; they are failing to realize the fact of this new unit and the headship of the man in the new unit.

So the wife must see to it that she pays this reverential deference to her husband. She has to make a mental and spiritual adjustment as her husband did also in this case. She does not receive her instructions any longer from her parents; she does not submit herself to them, she submits herself to her husband.

She still maintains the relationship of daughter, of course; but her own attitude must be right, and her father and mother's attitudes must be right.

It is wrong for the man who gets married to become absorbed into his wife's family, or for the wife to become absorbed into her husband's family. This is a new family. The relationships of love should be maintained with the parents on both sides, but not in terms of deference and of submission.

If there is interference by the parents on either side they have failed to understand and to live according to the biblical teaching concerning marriage.

The great adjustment she makes is that she submits to him. She must not compete with him; she must not strive with him; she must recognize that the essence of marriage is that she pays this deference to him.

There is an odd phrase used by the apostle Peter, which we should glance at for a moment.

As we read earlier I Peter 3:6 says, "As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."

I am sure you have noticed the change of conduct with respect to this matter over the last few centuries. We can read about people in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and notice how the wife habitually referred to her husband as Mr. So-and-so.

You may smile at that, you may even ridicule it, but there is a right balance to these matters. Sarah called Abraham *Lord*, and by this showed that she recognized the biblical principle. Then we read, “whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

This means that Christian wives are to pay deference to their husbands, and Peter tells them that they should do so in spite of what the pagan women round about them might say.

Here was something new in the pagan world, it was rare, it was exceptional, and of course it created a great stir. The society today is fast approaching this level of paganism in thought and action, and injustice and intolerance.

When pagan women, who were restless and rebellious, saw a Christian woman acting like this, offering and paying this deference to her husband, often she was attacked and persecuted.

But what Peter is teaching is this: Go on doing it because it is right; do not let them frighten you, do not let their persecution make the slightest difference to you. Let them insult you as much as they like; take no notice of them. Do not be terrified of them. And even if your husband misunderstands it and abuses it, go on doing it.

Peter says, “If you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” Do what is right. Do not be worried about what other people may say. The 21<sup>st</sup> century pagan world that we live in says the same thing as its 1<sup>st</sup> Century counterpart. Christian wives are told that they are being foolish, that they are denying their rights as women. Do not pay attention to that! God requires that we come out of the ways of the world.

Let people of the world say what they will. What do they understand about God’s way of life? Nothing! They do not have Christian minds, and they certainly are NOT filled with God’s Spirit.

Always remember that you are meant to do what is right, what is good; therefore, do not be frightened, do not be embarrassed; do not allow the world to interfere with your conduct and your behavior. This is the apostle Paul’s last command.

There is a wonderful balance in what God has inspired Paul to say that is forever preserved in the Scriptures. He sums it all up in verse 33, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

As long as they both do that—love and respect—there is no risk of disputes about rights or about my position, or my status. Here a man is given leadership; but because he loves his wife as himself he never abuses his position. And a woman is here submitting herself to this great and glorious ideal. She never has to be afraid that she will be taken advantage of, or that she will be trodden upon.

Wives should manifest such character as to be worthy of love; they owe this to their husbands to show that they are worthy of his confidence and affection.

It is not possible to force affection where it is undeserved; and, because a wife expects that her husband will love her more than he does any other earthly being, it is only right that she develop such character.

A wife may easily alienate the affections of her husband: if she is irritable and fault-finding; if none of his ways please her; if she shows no interest in his plans and in what he does; if she forsakes her home when she should be there, and if she never greets him with a smile; if she is wasteful of his earnings, and extravagant in her habits, it will be impossible to prevent the negative effects of such a course of life on her husband's mind.

And when a wife perceives the slightest evidence of alienated affection in her husband, she should humbly and lovingly ask whether she has caused it; and the husband should do the same.

To secure mutual love, there must be mutual kindness and mutual excellence of character. Whatever is seen to be offensive should be avoided and abandoned. All displays of anger and irritation should be avoided and overcome; and, while one spouse should make an effort to tolerate them, and not be offended, the other should make it a matter of conscience to overcome them.

The great secret of marital happiness is in the cultivation of a humble and loving attitude. It is not so much in the great and trying scenes of life that the strength of virtue is tested; it is in the events that are constantly occurring; the manifestation of kindness in the things that are happening every moment; the gentleness that noiselessly flows along every day.

The happiness of life is encouraged by ongoing little acts of kindness. We all need them all the time. In the marriage relationship there is always need of gentleness and love. Every successful team has two major principles at work: unity and submission. Notice

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the ultimate example of this unity and submission between God the Father and His Son.

**John 17:11** Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.

The Omnipotent Christ submits to His Father's will; if He did not there could be no perfect unity between them. Without submission there can be no true unity in His kingdom either. Pride is the greatest obstacle to submission, and therefore it destroys unity. This is true in the Church and just as true in marriages.

Submitting does not mean that you compromise yourself to wrong teaching and doctrine, that you say nothing when lies are being propagated.

How does a wife respect and show deference to her husband? Proverbs 31 is a list of principles that show how a wife manifests this attitude.

**Proverbs 31:10-31** Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her

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own works praise her in the gates.

Let me give you a summary and review of the principles listed here in Proverbs 31 that manifest respect and deference for her husband.

She is: trustworthy, good, industrious, diligent, wise in spending money, in good physical shape through exercise, buys quality things for her household, gets her hands dirty, generous to those in need, cares for the comfort and wellbeing of her family, tries to look nice and modestly stylish, her visible virtues increase the credibility of her husband's status, known for her modesty and good manners, wears dignity rather than all the latest fashions, does not gossip but thinks before she speaks in a gentle manner, upholds Christian standards in her family, teaches her children right from wrong, does not fill her down-time overeating and drinking, puts the emotional needs of her husband and children before her own, and cares for their mental and physical health.

**I Corinthians 10:24** Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.

She respects her husband because she is a woman who fears the Lord.

### **In the Fear of Christ**

There is something essential that I want to review for a moment from my first sermon in this series. The apostle Paul states a very clear principle regarding the right perspective to have when submitting to one another.

**Ephesians 5:21** Submitting [yourselves] to one another in the fear of Christ.

Some translations have, "in the fear of God." "In the fear of Christ" is technically more correct; however, both are acceptable.

Here, we are told exactly how and why we are to submit ourselves one to the other—in the fear of Christ. In other words, this last phrase of Paul's provides us with the motives for submitting ourselves to another.

So as brethren, we are to submit ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ. Paul is writing to people who agree about the truth, and what he is saying is something like this:

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You who agree about the truth, do it in the right way; do not be opinionated; listen patiently to the other person; do not lose your cool; know how to be indulgent in argument; let the others speak, let them express their ideas; do not be censorious; do not condemn a person for a word; be prepared to listen; be generous; go as far as you can.

When it comes to vital truth, stand, but always do it in the right way, in the Spirit of love. Do it with humility, do it with love, do it with understanding, and do it with hopefulness.

Let us notice WHY we are to submit ourselves to another—the reason for doing so. It is, in the fear of Christ. Paul is laying down his general principle—we are to live a life that is characterized by this, that we submit ourselves one to another.

Then he takes this up in three particular instances: wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters. But what is so interesting to notice is that in each of the three instances, as here in the general statement of principle, he is very careful to make this addition.

First, we see it in the general principle in verse 2, “Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Then, in the first application in verse 22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

He does not stop at saying, “Wives, submit to your own husbands,” he adds, “as to the Lord.”

Then, in the second application, in the case of children in Ephesians 6:1, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Still the same addition! He does not merely say, “Children, obey your parents for this is right.” He says, “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

And then, in the third application with regard to the servants and the masters we have the same thing here in Ephesians 6,

**Ephesians 6:5-7** Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the

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Lord, and not to men,

This clearly shows that this is a controlling principle. This is the over-riding attitude concerning the WAY that we do these things, the reason WHY we must do them.

Generally, this is the motive that is to govern the whole of Christian living. Everything the Christian does is to be done in the fear of Christ; and, by ultimate implication, in the fear of God. The apostle Paul emphasizes that by repeating it each time in the individual instances.

Let me put it negatively. We are to submit ourselves one to another, and do all things that come out of that, not because this is good in and of itself only and because not to do so is bad. There are people in the world who do this because they believe it is the right thing to do.

But that is not the reason WHY the Christian behaves in this way. The thing that distinguishes a Christian from the person who is not a Christian is not merely that he believes in Jesus Christ to salvation and trusts Him, but that, in addition, the life of the Christian is totally governed by God and Christ.

The Christian does not merely do things because they are good and right, and because it is wrong to do certain other things. There are millions of people in the world who do that. The differentiating mark of the Christian is that he does everything as to the Lord, in the fear of Christ, and ultimately—in the fear of God—which God's Holy Spirit makes possible.

## **Conclusion**

So in light of the several principles that have emerged, we can draw certain conclusions about Christian marriage.

The ultimate thing always is to consider our Supreme God and our Savior Jesus Christ. If a husband and a wife are together considering the will of God, you do not have to worry about their relationship to one another.

**Proverbs 28:5** Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all.

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Our human relationships and affections and loves are cemented by our common love to the Father and His Son.

The husband and the wife must be living to God and His glory and to His praise. Both must have in the forefront of their minds the analogy of Christ and the Church, and what He has done for the Church so she might be redeemed, and that they, as individuals, might be the children of God.

The headship of the husband must be the same kind of benevolent headship as the Headship of Christ over the Church. He gave Himself for her; He died for her; He nourishes and cherishes her life; He lives for her; His concern is that she may be glorious and blemishless and blameless, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

That is the secret—that we are always and forever to be looking to Him and realizing that marriage is but a pale reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church.

So the principle of success in marriage is this, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

“Husbands, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

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

We must thank God that we are brought into a new life; we are given a new power and everything is changed because of our betrothal to Jesus Christ our Bridegroom.

**II Corinthians 5:16-17** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

How wonderful that all the relationships of Christian life are transfigured and transformed, are elevated and uplifted, and we are enabled to live after the pattern and the example of Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom.