

Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 2)

General Marriage Principles

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In my first sermon in this series, we saw that the apostle Paul admonishes Christians to be wise by being controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that submission to Christ first and then the brethren is vital to our spiritual health and unity. Then Paul applies this to specific life relationships, such as family and marriage.

It is relatively easy to exhibit or give the appearance of a spirit-filled life for 2-4 hours a week in church, but it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to exhibit genuine godliness not only on the Sabbath, but also in everyday relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters.

In each of these three relationships, the first partner is commanded to be submissive to the second. But the second partner is also to show submissiveness by his care and concern for the first partner. Both partners are to act toward one another as a service rendered to God and Christ.

In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul presents a general principle and illustrates true righteous submission. Keep in mind that Paul's instructions in his epistle to the Ephesians are directed to believers, and they are filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:17, 20-21 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. . . . 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 Christ.

What Paul meant by 'submitting to one another' in verse 21, is explained through the particular examples of family relations. So 'submitting to one another' means submitting to others according to the authority and order established by God, as reflected in the examples that Paul gives in Ephesians 5.

Then we come to the practical application of the principle that the apostle Paul laid down in verse 21, 'submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.' That is the general principle, and now, as is his usual method, he comes to its particular application.

Ephesians 5:22-33 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For

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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. 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.

Marriage is part of the great 'mystery' of God's will. By 'mystery' Paul means the hidden plan of God that has come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is why we see Paul's quotation about marriage from Genesis 2 (here in verses 31-32). This ties in to the relationship between Christ and His church.

Paul's meaning is profound: he interprets the original creation of the husband-and-wife union as itself modeled on Christ's forthcoming union with the church as His "body." We see this in Ephesians 5:23, 'For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.'

Marriage, from the beginning of creation, was created by God to be a reflection of, and patterned after, Christ's relation to the church. Thus Paul's commands regarding the roles of husbands and wives do not merely reflect the culture of his day but present God's ideal for all marriages at all times, as exemplified by the relationship between the bride of Christ (the church) and Christ Himself (the Son of God).

In Ephesians 5:18-33, the apostle Paul follows his usual method of stating the general principle, and then following it up with the specifics of the practical application. This can be proven in three different ways. The first is, the word 'submit' that is found in many versions of the Bible. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

Actually, in the original the word 'submit' is not there at all, it is just: 'Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.' How do we explain the omission of the word? It means that

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Paul is carrying over the injunction about 'submitting' from verse 21 into verse 22. The very fact that the word is not actually repeated is therefore a proof that verse 22 is a continuation of verse 21, and that he is still dealing with the same theme, the general principle of submission.

He knows that will be in the minds of his readers, and as a result he says: 'Wives, [in this matter of submission] to your own husbands.' So the mere absence of the word 'submit' in the original is a proof in and of itself of what Paul is doing here.

But, there is a second proof. It is found in the fact that he mentions the wives before the husbands. That is not accidental; neither is it done merely out of politeness, or on the principle of 'ladies first'. The Bible does not do that. The Bible, as we will see, and as Paul expounds, invariably uses the other order, that is men before women. In fact, the law of the land does this, and we also do it in general parlance. We do not say Mrs. and Mr. So-and-so; we say Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so and so on.

So, when Paul puts the wives first, in his consideration of the relationship between husbands and wives, he has a very good reason for doing so. The reason is that he is particularly concerned about this question of submission. That is the principle that he has outlined in verse 21.

Now in the marriage relationship, the aspect of submission, as he shows, applies particularly to the wives. There is another aspect that applies to the husbands, and he deals with that later, because his statement is a full and balanced one. Because he is primarily concerned about the question of submission, he inevitably and quite naturally puts the wives first, in speaking about the marriage relationship.

So, there is the second proof of the claim that what we are dealing with here is an outworking of the general principle laid down in verse 21.

A third proof for this is that Paul uses the expression 'to your own husbands.' Notice the emphasis, 'Wives, submit to your own husbands.' In verse 21, he laid down the general principle of submission on the part of all Christians to others—'submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.'

The point, then, is this: If you do that in general, if you do that to everybody, so to speak, how much more so should wives do it to their own husbands in this particular relationship? I am taking the time to emphasize this, because if we are not clear that verse 21 really is the controlling principle, we cannot possibly understand his detailed teaching correctly about marriage and family.

Before we come to this essential subject—especially so in these present days—it is very important that we first look at Paul's statement in general. What Paul does here we find him doing also in the case of 'children and parents' and 'servants and masters.' You notice the order in each case. The children come before the parents. But why is that? This is because he is concerned about submission. Children do not come before parents; but in this matter they do, because it is an issue of submission.

The servants come before the masters, again for the same reason. I am trying to show that when we study a portion of Scripture such as this, and as we treat this matter in general, we will find that the apostle Paul uses his usual method. If we succeed in comprehending his method, in one particular instance, we will find a key to the understanding of his other writings.

Not only that; if we study exactly how Paul deals with any one problem, if we really have discovered his method, then when we are confronted by a problem we will find that all we need to do is to apply the method of the principle. As we apply the method, we will be able to discover the answer. So, what we have been looking at is Paul's method of presenting subjects of practical application. This is why he puts the order differently, because he is emphasizing the submission that is spoken of in verse 21.

What we are doing then, primarily at the moment, is to study Paul's method. Once we have done that, we will deal with the specific subjects he emphasizes. Just as a refresher, and because it is very important I am going to re-read Ephesians 5:22-33, because there are so many important principles in there for you to really have in your mind.

Ephesians 5:22-33 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. 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

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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.

So although the wife is commanded to submit to her husband, the greater responsibility falls on the husband in the marriage and the family. He is given much more instruction than the wife is here. Love is a broader term in many ways than submission, and so the husband has a much more responsible and important, so to speak, job than the wife. So although the emphasis is on submission of wives, in one sense there is an even greater emphasis on husbands loving their wives.

There are certain things that stand out here that illustrate Paul's method. Here is the first principle: The fact that we have become Christians does not mean that we will be automatically right in all that we think and in all we do. Why do I mention that one? Because you have seen the same thing that I have, over the years, that some husbands think that they are always right, and some wives think that they are always right.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul emphasizes one quality that wives must have, and one quality that husbands must have. Wives must be submissive, and in verse 33, Paul points out it must be balanced with respect. So three times Paul instructs wives how they must view and treat their husbands using the words: submit, subject, and respect.

In these same verses, Paul emphasizes that husbands must love their wives; and he balances this instruction with the admonishment to nourish and cherish their wives as they would themselves. So four times Paul instructs husbands to love their wives, and he adds the words nourish and cherish to help explain how they must view and treat their wives. There is a lot of care required by husbands for their wives, both in attitude and action.

Paul would not have had to emphasize these qualities of submission and love if, when we become Christians, we are automatically right about our treatment of one another. Obviously, we all need plenty of work in that area. There are some people who seem to think that the moment a person becomes a Christian, everything is perfectly plain and clear. The fact that we have become Christians, that the basic matter of our relationship to God has been put right, does not mean that we are now automatically right in all that we think, and in all that we say and do.

We need instruction about specific matters. Paul emphasizes this to the Colossian Christians, admonishing them to avoid becoming bitter.

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Colossians 3:18-19 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

Why would Paul have to write that unless he had observed certain things in marriages? Obviously, that is an area that husbands have had problems in, in being bitter to their wives.

So, even Christians can be guilty of bitterness. And what are we to do to thwart any root of bitterness? The answer is found in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:14-15 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.

What it is telling us here is to be a peacemaker, and live righteously according to the will of God, with all people, especially with our spouse. Bitterness destroys marriage relationships, and it prevents peace and unity. Remember, we are not always right just because we are Christians; we are still growing in grace and knowledge. Now this is an obvious statement that we all know, but it just seems like at times we forget that.

The second principle, found in Ephesians 5:21-33, is that the fact that a person has become a Christian will probably raise for him new problems that he has never had to confront before. Or, if it does not present new problems, it will certainly present old problems to him that he has never faced before in this way. Now, being converted, he sees situations from a totally new perspective. This is especially true in family and marriage.

Whereas he did not really think before, he is now compelled to think. And the moment he thinks, and because he thinks, he is confronted by new problems, or old problems from a new perspective.

This was very much the case in the early church. It worked something like this. Take the case of the wife, for example, at the time of Christ and the apostles, and even back into ancient Israel. A husband and wife had been living together as pagans, even in ancient Israel, sadly. Neither being Christians, they lived their married life as pagans did at that time. But now the wife becomes converted, and becomes a Christian, but the husband does not.

The temptation that immediately confronted such a wife was to say: 'Now I'm free. I understand things as I never understood them before. Christ's apostle told me that "there is neither barbarian, Scythian, male nor female, bond or free". So, I don't continue to live now as I used to. I have an understanding that my husband doesn't have.'

The danger was for the wife to misinterpret her new life in such a way that would upset the marriage relationship. Freedom does not mean that you are now able to do whatever you want, whenever you want. The secular meaning of the word 'freedom' has a broad range of application from total absence of restraint to merely a sense of not being unduly hampered or frustrated. For the Christian, it means freedom from sin, and enlightenment to the truth of God. The use of this freedom is guided by the principles of righteousness with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The same potential problems arise between children and parents. Very often when young adult children are converted, and their parents are not, and they have an understanding that their parents do not have, they may misinterpret the new situation, and may be tempted by Satan to misuse and abuse it. Sometimes they break God's commandment that tells the children to honor their parents. So, almost inevitably, with the enlightenment that comes with spiritual conversion, new spiritual problems arise that they had never had to face before. It is not that this is a common problem, but it is just used as an illustration.

The apostle Paul himself is a vivid example of having to deal with new problems as a result of his conversion. When his name was Saul he persecuted the church; but when he became converted and renamed Paul, he was persecuted himself. The suffering that he inflicted on others was now his to endure. Do you remember what he said to the Galatians about his own conduct before his conversion?

Galatians 1:13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

Later, he writes to the Thessalonians about being persecuted with other members of the church.

I Thessalonians 2:13-15 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

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For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

So we gather from Ephesians 5:22-33, that the great change that takes place in our new converted life has a tendency to raise new problems. The result is that we have to think very carefully, to discover exactly what is right in this new life, and how we are to apply biblical teachings to new situations in which we find ourselves.

The third principle is that Christianity is a way of life; it has something to say about the whole of our life, not just parts of it. There is no aspect of life that it does not consider, and that it does not govern. There must be no separate compartments in our Christian life.

Very often, the danger to these early Christians was, that these people—husband and wife, or children and parents—on their being converted, and becoming Christians, might say to themselves, something like this: ‘This is something that only involves my religious life—to worshipping God on the Sabbath; it has nothing to do with my marriage, it has nothing to do with my work, it has nothing to do with my relationship with my parents—and so on.’

Obviously, that is very wrong according to Ephesians 5:22-33. There is nothing so wrong and nothing so fatal, as to be living a life of compartments. This is what the Gnostics do. They commit sin in the body, but claim that they are not committing sin in the mind.

I had a boss, about thirty-five years ago, who did not really like that I would not work on the seventh day Saturday Sabbath. He lamely tried to convince me to give it up and he said to me: “I give God fifteen minutes of my time every Sunday morning; the rest of the week is mine.” I quickly stepped back—lest lightning strike! But since he said it in ignorance God had mercy on him.

So if a person lives his life in compartments; and it is difficult to tell on Monday that he is a Christian. His conception of God’s way of life is entirely wrong, and he is a hypocrite!

God’s way of life is a whole; the Christian teachings have something to say about every realm and department of life. Aquila and Priscilla, fellow workers with Paul in Christ, explained the way of God, not just doctrines to Apollos. Apollos had been taught the

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doctrines of the way of the Lord, but Aquila and Priscilla helped him with the application of them in his everyday life.

Acts 18:24-26 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Aquila is never mentioned without his wife Priscilla, so they were obviously a successful married couple, and they were one. Her name sometimes takes the precedence of his, which suggests that she was meant to receive additional honor. Also, they are mentioned in Romans 16:3, as risking their lives for Paul. They were a unified and dedicated husband and wife team, and they were pillars in the church.

In another example, Paul defended himself to Felix the Governor, stating that he always strives to live this way of life.

Acts 24:14-16 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

He is talking about submission in one sense there, towards both God and men. They were members of God's church, and convicted of God's way of life. This was not just a once a week feel-good preference for these people, and hopefully it is not for us.

Many unconverted people are very religious; some of them pray every morning, and then having said their prayers, they become hard, greedy, unkind, and unfair. They may antagonize many against Christianity, because, so often there was this kind of dichotomy, this failure to realize the wholeness of God's way of life, and that the Christian must never live his life in compartments.

God's way of life must be THE WAY I am married, THE WAY I treat my parents, THE

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WAY I work, THE WAY I do everything, and THE WAY I am.

The fourth principle is that Christian teaching never contradicts or undoes fundamental biblical teaching with respect to life and living. There is no contradiction between the New Testament and the Old Testament.

This has to be emphasized, today, because of the common negative attitude toward the Old Testament among mainstream denominations. People just do not seem to be all that interested in what the Old Testament has to say, because many have been programmed by false teachers to believe that the stories of the Old Testament are myths and legends.

Some professing mainstream Christians are even foolish enough to say that they do not believe in the God of the Old Testament. So-called Christian preachers say from their pulpits, and it is applauded, that they do not believe in the God of the Ten Commandments and the moral law.

They dismiss the Old Testament teaching, and say that we have to be guided by the New Testament teaching only. Some of them even go further than that, and say that we are not even to be governed by the New Testament, because we know so much more now. This is the evil spirit behind their non-biblical traditions—their antichrist rhetoric. I mention this because there is the tendency to dismiss the parts of the Bible that do not fit their self-promoted religion. The New Testament never contradicts, never sets aside the fundamental biblical teaching with regard to human relationships and the order of life. And that includes marriage as well.

Paul's point is based partly on what is taught in the Old Testament. It is the same with regard to the family; it is the same with all these fundamental orders of life. The fact that you become a Christian does not change those things at all. What the New Testament actually does is to supplement the Old Testament, to open it out, to give us a larger view of it, and to help us to see the spirit behind the original injunction. But it never contradicts it.

II Timothy 3:10-17 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and

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been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Some people somehow get hold of the idea that, because they are new beings in Christ, the old fundamental principles no longer hold, but according to the New Testament they do. Christian teaching never contradicts or undoes fundamental biblical teaching with respect to life and living. There is no contradiction between the New Testament and the Old Testament. The question of discrepancies is primarily a question of interpretation and imperfect translations, not of negligence by God in His inspiration of His written Word. If there is anything that appears to be a contradiction it is because we do not understand it, or that they have misinterpreted, or mis-translated it.

In addition, the New Testament always gives us reasons for its teaching. It always gives us explanations for what it says; it always gives us principles to apply in our lives. The Bible does not merely throw a number of rules and regulations at us. It always tells us why it is better to live God's way of life. You remember the blessings and cursings chapter in Deuteronomy. It spells out to Israel, and to us, exactly what will happen if we do the right thing, and what will happen if we do the wrong thing.

Christianity is not like the military in that respect. We are not simply to blindly accept orders given by religious leaders. We are not merely to go through repetitive drills without analysis. That is necessary in memorizing facts, but not in applying righteous principles in life. We should always know why we are behaving in this way; we should always try to understand the reason for it. Sometimes we do not understand, and sometimes it takes years and years before we do, but we must keep trying.

When it comes to spiritual principles, there should be no working against the grain, or feeling that 'You have to do it, but wishing you didn't.' If that is the attitude then it is a wrong one, and you will only deteriorate spiritually from there.

The Christian rejoices in the way that he is living. He sees it clearly, he does not want anything else; his mind is satisfied. In contrast, a person who is not a Christian does not know what it is like to be spiritually mature. There is no teaching in the world that pays us such a compliment as the Word of God. It puts God's truth to our reason and puts it to our understanding.

That certainly is in stark contrast to the television commercials of yesterday and today. I was listening to an old radio show of “Amos and Andy”, and the commercial break came on multiple times advertising a clothes detergent. I do not remember the brand name (‘Bright White’ or something like that). The commercial voice cheerfully said, “It makes your clothes whiter than white, brighter than bright!” Is that really possible? Or, is it just another advertising lie that we have become so accustomed to?

God’s truth does not come to us when we are more or less passive and unconscious, like the commercial advertisements are designed to do when we watch television and go into our trance state. God’s truth requires that we reason out the teaching, that we take a principle and work it out, as the apostle Paul does in Ephesians 5. That is the method of sanctification; that is the process of conversion.

Sanctification is the carrying on to perfection the work begun in regeneration, and it extends to the whole person and all aspects of life, especially in marriage and family, which is the perfect proving ground for God’s way of life, because it is so intimate. Next to that is the church, the body of Christ. In the spiritual sense the church is the better test drive, and then secondarily the family. But we are dealing with the family on a daily basis, and we are dealing with the church less than that.

The fifth principle is that there is an intimate relationship between doctrine and practice. Each helps the other, and each illustrates the other.

The great doctrinal section was chapters 1-3. A little came into chapter 4, but now in chapter 5 we have come down into the realm of practicalities and ordinary relationships, and everyday matters. Paul is very practical in Ephesians 5—wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters, and the practical are intimately interwoven with spiritual principles regarding Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:23-27 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 we see the intimate relationship between doctrine and practice. They are very

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closely tied in together.

Have you noticed, and have you been somewhat amazed at this, when you have heard it at a marriage service and this section of Scripture has been read? It is thrilling to find that Paul, in dealing with this practical matter, suddenly ties us into the doctrine of the nature of the church? He raises the marriage state to its spiritual level.

In telling wives and husbands how to behave towards one another, he introduces the doctrine of the relationship of the church to Christ. This shows us that we should never give the Scriptures a superficial analysis.

Here, in Paul's practical instruction, he suddenly introduces this tremendous doctrine of the nature of the church, and the relationship of the church to Jesus Christ. What we must bear in mind is that doctrine and practice are so intimately related that they cannot be separated. Doctrine is useless without practice; practice is lost without doctrine. They are a marriage in one sense.

So, especially in marriage and family issues, spiritual principles must be applied if you want a happy marriage and successful family. If you are a weekend Christian only, then you are at the very least a weekday failure in marriage and family.

The sixth principle is stated in light of all the preceding principles. When you are confronted by any problem, never approach it directly; never start by only considering the thing in and of itself. That is what we all tend to do.

Abram and Sarai made this mistake, and it caused their family and marriage, and the world, a great deal of misery ever since. As I read Genesis 15, and as I talk about this I in no way mean to demean Abraham and Sarah at all. They are listed in Hebrews 11, as heroes of faith, and that is the way that we remember them. However, in this case there is a lesson to be learned.

Genesis 15:1-6 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to

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him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Initially, Abram had faith in God's promise, but when his faith began to wane he allowed his wife, Sarai, to convince him to take matters into his own hands. Even though God promised to provide an heir for Abram and Sarai, they did not have patient endurance, and they only considered the thing in and of itself. They carried out their own will, instead of the will of God.

Genesis 16:1-5 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me."

At this point we observe a very serious marriage problem. You know the rest of the story. Sarai dealt harshly with her handmaid Hagar, and Hagar ran away. But God told Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her; and He would multiply her descendants greater than could be counted. So Hagar bore wild Ishmael whose descendants would be in perpetual conflict with all other peoples on earth and them with him. Ishmael was the father of the Arabs of today. Need I say any more?

So Abram and Sarai decided that they could not wait for God to solve their family problem, and they took matters into their own hands and in a very shallow way only considered the thing in and of itself, without any regard for God's will. So marriage and family began to break down very rapidly in Abraham's family.

Abram and Sarai only had to wait about thirteen more years after Ishmael, Hagar's son, was born before Isaac was born. The number thirteen is a biblical number that represents 'rebellion.' Abram and Sarai had rebelled against God by not waiting for His salvation in childbearing. Had they not only considered the thing in and of itself, maybe

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God would have blessed them with Isaac thirteen years earlier.

Their marriage and family would have gone a lot smoother had they not only considered the thing in and of itself. Eventually, they were faithful in this area and God blessed them. 'Sarai,' whose name God changed to 'Sarah,' eventually was faithful and she received God's promise.

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

Sarah truly believed God would fulfill His promise, and she was rewarded for that. People often approach a practical problem in their lives directly, as did Abram and Sarai; and the result of this generally wrong, common human approach is that they end up suffering in ways that could have been avoided had they patiently waited in faith for God's will to manifest itself.

When we are confronted by a particular problem we should not immediately apply a worldly solution to it. First, we should ask the question: Is there any spiritual principle; is there any doctrine in the Scriptures that governs this kind of problem or question? In other words, before we begin to deal with the individual problem that is in front of us, we must start with applying the general principle, and then narrow it down to applying the specific principle.

Let me give you an illustration of what I mean: Anyone who has ever done any chemistry, and who has been asked to identify a substance, will recognize the method. The chemist starts with the most general tests, the large group tests. Then he can exclude certain groups; and he narrows it down to one group. Then he has to divide it up into divisions, to sub-divisions of the group; and then he narrows it down and down, and finally he comes to the specific individual substance.

That is Paul's method in Ephesians 5, as it is his method everywhere. It is the movement from general to specific. Do not jump at a problem, do not tackle it in and of itself; get hold of the applicable spiritual principle—the governing doctrine. Then, begin to narrow it down from there.

The seventh and last principle that we find in Ephesians 5 is also very practical. We deduce it from all that has gone before. Notice how Paul deals with the spirit and the attitude of the relationship of wives and husbands, and husbands and wives; notice his

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method.

This subject of marriage is one of standing jokes of the world, is it not? This is something that can always raise a laugh. The poorest comedian tries to make something of this when he has nothing else—marriage relationships, husbands and wives always draws a laugh.

I barely have to point out that Paul does not handle it this way. You cannot handle any Christian problem like that.

But there are other negatives also. Not only does he not handle it jokingly, flippantly, and lightly, but also there is a complete absence of an adversarial spirit here. There is nothing heated, nothing assertive, no standing up for rights, and no anxiety to prove that one is right and the other wrong.

Ephesians 5:22-25 'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord'.
'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her'.

That is the opposite way marital matters are normally dealt with, are they not? That is why there is so much trouble. Paul evades all that by lifting it up and putting it into another context; and by doing that he avoids all of these difficulties that the world faces.

Paul's method, positively, is this—it is the principle: 'in the fear of Christ,' that he already laid down in verse 21: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.' Then he repeats it: 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord.'

If you begin to take your stand on the one side or on the other, you are already doomed to failure because you are in an adversarial spirit. Paul raises the attitudes of both husband and wife to a higher spiritual level by immediately adding 'to the Lord.' This should be thought of at the beginning of every potential argument in a marriage.

Every Christian relationship should be handled that way. A Christian who tends to lose his or her temper or raise his or her voice in an argument should not speak at all. Whether you prove your point or not you have lost everything by losing your temper. Here is some wisdom for you on this, straight from God's word:

Psalms 37:30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice.

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Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.

Proverbs 15:2, 4 The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.

Well, you get the picture. The attitude of the Proverbs 31 woman is based: 'in the Lord' and 'in the fear of Christ'.

In Ephesians 5, Paul is talking about submission, and his principle is that before we consider the merits of husband and wife, both of them must submit themselves to the Lord, 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ'. And as both do that, you will have your argument 'on your knees' in prayer. What a difference it makes! If only we conducted these difficult matters on our knees; what a difference it would make!

This is not only true concerning the issue of husbands and wives. Notice 'the heat' that is generated over the argument about politics, and the various other secular matters that are stirring up people today. All you have to do is mention Obama and people get their hair up.

The right attitude is that we must do it always in submission to God, with a desire to please Him, with a readiness always to be taught and to be led by Him.

We have seen seven general principles that not only govern this matter of marriage, but govern every problem that can arise in your Christian life. Having done that, let us go on to the proper view of marriage. All I have been saying is illustrated to perfection in the apostle Paul's treatment of the Christian view of marriage, and the Christian teaching concerning marriage.

The first major thing that he tells us is that the Christian view of marriage is a unique view. It is a view that is entirely different from every other view. It is a view that you only find in the inspired written Word of God. How should the Christian view marriage?

Let us start again with a negative. The Christian's way of viewing marriage is not the way that marriage is generally viewed by the vast majority of people. Do you have a clear well-defined Christian view of marriage? Have you discovered the uniqueness of the Christian view? Do you see how it differs so essentially from the worldview?

The first common secular view of marriage is a purely physical one. It is something that is based almost exclusively on physical attraction, and the desire for physical gratification.

It is a legalizing of physical attraction and physical gratification. So often it is nothing but that; and the result is sustained divorce. The parties have not even thought about it, they have no view of marriage at all; they are governed entirely by instincts and impulses; it is fundamentally on the animal level, and does not rise above it. There is no thought whatsoever about marriage in and of itself; it is nothing but a legalizing of something that they are anxious to do without feeling guilty.

Then there is a second common secular view of marriage that rises a little higher than the first. It is a little more intelligent than the first view, because it regards marriage as a human arrangement and a human contrivance.

Anthropology and evolution teach us that there was a time when human beings were more or less like animals; they were promiscuous and behaved as animals behave. But as humans began to develop, and to evolve, they began to realize that certain arrangements were necessary. They began to recognize that promiscuity led to confusion and to excess, and to a lot of trouble; so after a long process of agonizing and of experiment, and of trial and error, human nature in its wisdom, that is, civilization itself, came to the conclusion that it would be right and well and good that you should have monogamy—one man marrying one woman.

It is a matter of social development—that is the false teaching of anthropology. But the whole time, the worldview of marriage is that it is something that man has discovered. As he passes Acts of Congress to control traffic and parking and so on, so he has discovered a way of solving this problem of men and women and their relationships to one another, and to children. Or, so he reasons.

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It is something entirely on the human level. That is probably the common assumption that is made by the vast majority of people. We find it at times, even among professing Christians!

Another characteristic of this view—and it arises because the world does not have a fundamentally correct view of marriage—is that the whole approach to marriage is one that expects trouble.

That was very true of the pagan world. Husbands tended to tyrannize over their wives and to make slaves of them, and the wives acted deceitfully. The atmosphere was one of jealousy and antagonism, leading to fighting and quarreling of necessity.

Instead of this common submission to God, each one stood for his or her own rights. It is not a true partnership, but a kind of agreement that for certain purposes they were going to do certain things together; but actually there was an underlying bitterness and antagonism and sense of opposition in those marriages, and there still is today.

Examine the commonly held view of marriage, and of the marriage state and relationship. You see it in the cartoons, you see it in the reports of the cases in the courts, you see it, and I repeat, also in the popular jokes of today.

It is this way because of this completely wrong view of what marriage really means. Today, the whole issue has become aggravated because of the modern notions of equality between men and women resulting from the so-called 'feminist movement.' I do not mean that this is the only cause, but this is a tremendous perversion of the family and marriage.

This has perverted the whole problem; and it makes the subject of marriage especially urgent at this time. There has been this modern movement of feminism that claims that men and women are equal in every respect, and that there should be no division or distinction at all, but complete equality.

Now, while on the one hand, there are aspects of that belief with which any Christian man, let alone any sane intelligent man, agrees with. On the other hand, taking it in general, and as a principle, it goes against the plain teaching of the Scriptures at this point. Ephesians 5 is one example. Feminism is totally against Scripture, but there are areas where women are not treated equally the way they should be. But Scripture clears all of that up.

Feminism is without question the cause of much confusion, much trouble, and much

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damage, not only to the marriage state, but also to the family as a fundamental unit in life. The result is that discipline is gone, order is gone, and children are not given a chance. Why? Because their parents are not in the right relationship to one another; and the child is bewildered at seeing this competition, this conflict, where there should be unity. This modern feminist movement has tended to confuse the whole issue. God is not the author of confusion, Satan is!

It seems even to be established in the thinking of many who call themselves Christian, and who claim to believe in the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God and our only authority. Some women in the church have absorbed this feminist mentality toward men, and it is flat out wrong.

In Ephesians 5, we see immediately that that is not the Christian approach to marriage. There are four things to keep in mind:

(1) The Christian view of marriage is governed entirely and solely by the teaching of the Scriptures, both Old and the New Testaments.

The apostle Paul derives his teaching from the Old Testament as well as from the New Testament. After all, it was the same being: the LORD of the Old Testament and the Lord of the New Testament—the same being who became the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

So someone who claims to be a Christian does not say, 'Well, what I think about marriage is this.' He says rather, 'What does the Bible say about marriage?' Thus, there is a complete difference at the very beginning, and he 'submits' himself to the teaching of the whole Bible.

He does not say, 'By now we have developed and advanced so much beyond the ancients. Women were virtually thought of as slaves. The apostle Paul may be right about salvation, but still wrong on the subject of women!' A Christian never thinks that way.

The moment you humanly reason that way, you no longer believe the Scriptures, and you have no right to say that you believe that they are the inspired, infallible written Word of God. No! The true Christian submits to the Old Testament and to the New Testament. His whole life is governed on that principle in the matter of thought as well as conduct.

(2) We discover that marriage is not a human contrivance or arrangement, but God's ordinance. It is instituted by God, something that God in His infinite grace and kindness

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has appointed and ordained and prepared and established for men and women.

Mark 10:6-9 But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Other scriptures that support this are: Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-24, and Hebrews 13:4.

Marriage is of God, and not of man. The teaching of the anthropologists and psychologists is based on speculation and imagination; it is absolutely false. The teaching of the Bible is the only truth about this matter; it is God's plan and God's ordinance.

(3) The terms of the relationship are clearly and plainly stated as we saw in Mark 10.

(4) Marriage can only be fully understood as we understand the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the church. That is central; the apostle Paul carries on the teaching about Christ and the church right through Ephesians 5:22-33.

In other words, it comes to this: if we are not clear about Jesus Christ and the church, and the relationship of the church to Him, we cannot understand marriage. It is impossible because it is only in the light of that doctrine that we really understand God's purpose and teaching concerning marriage and family. It is only the Christian who truly understands and appreciates marriage. That is one of the wonderful results of being a Christian. Christianity not only deals with our salvation; but it involves the whole of our life.

There is nothing more wonderful than to see the difference Christianity makes in the husband/wife relationship. No non-Christian man or woman has a true conception of marriage; but if we are Christians there should be no difficulty in understanding the importance and the level of marriage, and what it means.

The spirit and the attitude that is required in order to have a successful Christian marriage is that we must always live it in submission to God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, with a desire to please Them, with a willingness to be taught and to be led by God and by His Word.

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If yours is a true Christian marriage, you have submitted yourself to Christ, and so has the other. And you have both submitted yourselves not only to one another, but also to all of the other members of the church. You are governed by a higher loyalty, by loyalty to Christ who did not consider His own rights and prerogatives, but who considered you, and your desperate need.

He humbled Himself, laid aside His rights, and took upon Him even the form of a servant, and even went to His gruesome death. He came not only to save you from condemnation, but also to give you life, and to give you life more abundantly, and to give you understanding of everything to His own glory.

If you see marriage on a new level, you see everything on a new level. You not only submit yourself to it, you find joy in it, and you praise God for it.