

Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 4)

Analogy of the Body

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As you may vaguely recall in my previous three sermons, I have spoken about how we are to be submissive in the fear of Christ; and that Christianity is a way of life that regulates every minute of our lives. There is no such thing as a weekend Christian.

Also, I pointed out that God is the One who established the order of Creation, where Eve came after Adam and from him; and that God's government is not only essential for the church, but for the human family also. And we have seen that the wife is not the slave of her husband, but a helper comparable to him—no less than him, but equal in spiritual potential.

We know that God is the One who instituted marriage. Beginning with human creation, God established that very fact. He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." It is God who brought and presented Eve to Adam after creating her, in effect pronouncing the first marriage union in human history. Not only did God acknowledge the marriage, but He also joined the couple.

Today, we are going to take a look at the analogy of the body with regard to marriage.

Jesus Christ taught that marriage was the joining together of two people so that they become one flesh—one body.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul relates the relationship of Christ and His church to that between husband and wife. Christ loves the church as His own body, and in this same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, for we are members of His body. We have been analyzing Ephesians 5:17-33, and today we will continue covering marriage principles, beginning in verse 22.

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.

We come back to this statement in verse 22 because so far in this series we have been able to look at only one aspect of this in detail. The Apostle Paul gives us two specific

reasons why wives should submit themselves to their own husbands.

We have considered the first reason, which is that it is a matter of the order of creation. Paul says, "For the husband is head of the wife." God ordained it so He made man and woman at the beginning. And we saw how the New Testament not only confirms that, but constantly goes back to that original ordinance of God.

So here we are dealing with something that is basic and fundamental to the whole of man's life on earth, and to his well being, and that is God's ordinance with regard to the whole of life. The God who ordained the family ordained marriage. The God who ordained the state ordained marriage. As we should submit ourselves to the state, so we should pay attention to this fundamental ordinance of God with regard to the relative positions of husbands and wives, and the relationship that should exist between them. (Submission to the state is limited, and is conditional of course.)

So far this is general. It is still there as a foundation, but we need to build upon it. That is why Paul puts it first. But then, he goes on to his second reason, which is a specifically Christian one, so that the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church. This takes us further; it does not do away with the first, but it adds to it, and it helps us to understand the first. That is what God's truth does with regard to the whole of life.

It is only the Christian who can really appreciate life in general in this world. In other words, it is only the Christian, in the final analysis, who can really enjoy creation. The Christian sees creation in a different way from the person of the world. There is newness about it.

He does not merely see the thing in and of itself; he sees the great Creator and the wonder of His ways, the variety, the color and the beauty. In other words, being a Christian means that your whole outlook upon life is enriched in appreciation for what God has done.

It does not matter what it is, every gift that people have, and which they manifest, can only be truly appreciated by Christians. They see with greater depth; they have fuller understanding. That is to say, God's truth not only adds to what we had before, but it greatly enriches what we had before, and gives us a deeper insight into it.

Here, in verse 23, we find that this specifically Christian addition not only helps us to understand the order of Creation already laid down, but on top of that, it adds a new quality, another aspect, another emphasis to it all.

Here is the statement: The husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. What we are looking at here is something that only a Christian can understand; no one else can. A person who does not believe in Jesus Christ, and who does not know the way of salvation, obviously cannot understand what the Scripture means in saying that Christ is head of the body, which is the church.

It is meaningless to him; he does not understand it at all. Such a person therefore cannot understand this specifically Christian view of marriage. This is a deduction from the doctrine of the church. Therefore if a person does not understand Christ's teaching regarding the church, according to the apostle Paul, he cannot ultimately understand God's design and purpose for marriage. So the worldly person goes into marriage blindly.

This leads us immediately to draw a certain conclusion: that obviously a Christian should never marry a non-Christian. We are told that specifically in II Corinthians 6,

II Corinthians 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty."

That is undoubtedly a reference to this issue of marriage. And if we needed a reason for accepting that exhortation we have it right there. If a believer marries an unbeliever, the position would be that one of the people getting married would have this exalted Christian view of marriage, while the other would know nothing about it.

Already there would be a defect in the marriage. The non-Christian is not in it, and he does not enter into it in the same way; the result is already a division. The one has something the other does not have. There is already the seed of conflict, as the apostle Paul proves in that same statement in II Corinthians 6.

The relationship between husband and wife, and wife and husband, is comparable to that between Christ and the church, and the church and Christ. Paul, for our comfort,

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says later on, "This is a great mystery!" It certainly is to the world, but it was to us before we were taught and understood it.

The relationship between Christ and the church is a mystery. It is a fact, but it is a great mystery—this union between the church and Christ, and the individual believer and Christ. It is a fact that we must try to understand.

Paul says that the relationship between husband and wife, and wife and husband, is comparable to that fact, and that is the way that we should think of it. He introduces us to the realm of this important teaching concerning God's church.

The apostle Paul, with his logical mind, knows that the converted minds of the Ephesians should have no difficulty understanding this, because he has already taught them about this doctrine. He did this earlier in this letter in Ephesians 1, where he prays at the end of the chapter that they might know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them.

Ephesians 1:15-20 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

He says that it is the power manifested in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Paul explained to them the doctrine of the church, and then he applied it. He did the same thing again in Ephesians 4, and added a little more to the definition:

Ephesians 4:15-16 But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things

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into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul draws upon that teaching so that they could understand the true nature of Christian marriage. Here in Ephesians 4, he is emphasizing the organic, the vital union, that is, the ultimate relationship. He refers to joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, in verse 16, the nerves and the arteries that bring sustenance from the head, from the center, to every part of the body.

It is one life, and it is one life in a similar way as the life of the church in her relationship to the Head, which is Christ. Here of course, Paul is specifically interested in one aspect of all that, the aspect of dependence.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church.

Paul is dealing with this aspect of dependence and of submission, and he introduces this additional element so that we can have a clear understanding of how it comes in, and why it comes in. Later on, he will deal with the other side of it, the husband with respect to the wife.

As we consider this statement, a problem immediately confronts us. Look at it again, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church, and He is the Savior of the body."

The problem that occupies so much of the attention of the Bible commentators is, "Why did Paul add this further statement? Why did he not just say, 'The husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church. Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything'?" Why did he add, "And he is the Savior of the body?"

Please listen very closely to what I am about to explain. Some commentators try to say that this is a purely independent addition, and that what the Apostle Paul is referring to exclusively when he says, 'he is the Savior of the body,' is that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the church. That is, of course, a true statement, Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. The commentators go on to say that this has nothing to do with the

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husband. Why then did Paul say it in this context? Well, they say, he said it for this reason. He had committed himself to this, that the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church; and the very mention of the name of Christ makes Paul cry out, 'and he is Savior of the body.'

They say it has nothing to do with what Paul is explaining in the context at the moment, but the very mention of the name of Christ makes Paul blurt out this phrase. So, they falsely argue that this is an independent phrase, and that it does not apply to the husband's relationship to the wife.

The commentators' arguments are these: They ask, "Can you say that the husband is the savior of his wife as Christ is the Savior of the church?" That, they say, is nonsense. Christ, we know, died for the church.

Christ saves us by His atoning death and by His resurrection; but you cannot say that about any other relationship. It is quite unique. Paul was just carried away by the depth of his feeling, and put in this independent phrase that obviously has nothing to do with the husband/wife relationship. Some of that is true, but not all of it. It is correct, and we know that Christ died for the church, and that Christ is the Savior of the church, and that no one else can be.

What do we say with respect to that? We have to grant, of course, that if you read a statement like this superficially, and without examining it carefully, you would have to agree with it. There is no need to argue about this. Christ as Savior of the church, in that sense, is unique, and that obviously does not apply to the husband.

But that is not the whole of their argument. They have a further argument to which they attach very great importance. It is based on the word translated 'Therefore' at the beginning of verse 24. The verse goes like this:

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

The point that they make here is this. They say that the translation 'Therefore' is wrong; and, in fact, they are right in saying that. But, then they go on to say that the word that is translated 'Therefore' should in reality be translated 'Nevertheless.' It is a word of contrast, and it always presents a contrast.

The commentators say that verses 23 and 24 should be read like this, 'For the husband

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is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Nevertheless'—[though that is not true of the husband with respect to the wife, in spite of that, or—'Nevertheless let the wives be subject to their own husbands in everything.'

The commentators feel the case is indisputable; that the Apostle Paul himself says in effect, "Now when I said that He is the Savior of the body I had forgotten for the moment my analogy between the relationship of Christ and the church, and the husband and the wife—"Nevertheless"—in spite of that, though that is not true in the realm of husband and wife, the wives should still submit themselves to their own husbands, even as the church is subject to Christ.'

But there is an adequate answer to this wrong interpretation. The first reason this is wrong is that it confines the meaning of the word 'Savior.' The word 'Savior' does not always carry that one meaning, of Christ giving His life for the church, and His blood being shed. The dictionary will give you two different meanings for the word savior.

It is the most common meaning, but it is not the only meaning to this term 'Savior.' There is an example of this in I Timothy 4:

I Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

That is exactly the same word that is used in Ephesians 5:23, about 'the Savior of the body.' Here, in I Timothy 4:10, we are told that God, the living God, is Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. You cannot say that that means that all men enjoy salvation in the spiritual sense, because we know that there will be some who do not make it into God's Kingdom.

Well then, it means that the word 'savior' there has a different connotation. What it means there is 'preserver' or 'sustainer'—that He looks after, that He cares for. He is the preserver of all men, especially of those who believe.

It means 'the helper of all people' when we take the other meaning for the Greek word for 'Savior,' it does not refer to forgiveness of sins, but to God's common grace by which God helps and protects people in need. The emphasis is on God's care for the non-believing world.

Let me give you another example:

Jeremiah 14:7-9 O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, Do it for Your name's sake; For our backslidings are many, We have sinned against You. O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, Why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be like a man astonished, Like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O Lord, are in our midst, And we are called by Your name; Do not leave us!

So you have physical Israel there pleading for God to be their savior in time of trouble. Being unconverted, they are referring to Savior as being the physical Savior, and of course those who may have been converted in Israel, may be referring to it in a spiritual sense. But most of the people were referring to it as a preserver type of individual.

Here, Jeremiah is writing under the distress of the severity of the drought that forced the people to cry to God for deliverance. While admitting their sins and their backsliding, they asked God to intervene and supply rain. By calling God the Hope of Israel and the Savior, the people acknowledged God's unique position as the only One who could deliver their physical nation from its current crisis of drought. Of course this does have a spiritual meaning attached to it as well.

God was their Savior (preserver—provider—sustainer—deliverer) in a physical sense, because He could deliver them from the severe drought. He could "save" them in time of trouble. For those Israelites who would repent, have faith in Him, and be obedient to Him, He could save them in a spiritual sense, as well as from physical problems such as drought and famine.

But, since most of the Israelites were unconverted, when God acted as their "Savior" it was primarily on a physical level. However, He is the spiritual Savior of all those who are faithful, whether it be in this age, in the millennium, or during the Great White Throne Judgment one-hundred-year period.

The point is that, in the Bible, the word 'savior' primarily means: the one who saves from any form or degree of evil. In its highest sense, the word indicates the relation sustained by Jesus Christ to His redeemed ones. But, it also carries the lower sense of the one who saves from physical danger or destruction.

Often, a person who leads a nation to freedom is referred to as the savior of that nation:

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George Washington and Winston Churchill were considered saviors of their nations from a time of war. There are also dolphin saviors, economy saviors, and so on. In this lesser sense, the use of the word "savior" is very commonly used in English today.

We are reminded by Jesus Christ that God 'makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'; yes, and gives food to all.' It is in that sense that He is "Savior" to ALL men, women and children.

So why not give that meaning to the word 'savior' 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"? He is the One who looks after and safeguards the body. Of course here Savior of the body, with reference to Christ, is in a spiritual sense. But this is an analogy of the body, and so we can rightly apply that analogy in a physical sense to marriage.

But, I have further reasons for rejecting the false explanation by many commentators who confine this little phrase 'savior of the body' solely to Jesus Christ and His saving work.

The second reason is that verses 28 and 29, which are to follow, insist on our interpreting this phrase as applying to the husband and wife, as well as to Christ and the church. Paul says:

Ephesians 5:28-29 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.

So what is the husband doing here? He is acting as a savior (in the lower physical sense of: one who saves from physical danger). He is looking after their body. He is preserving them on the physical level. Of course, we know that God is the ultimate Savior; He is the one that saves and protects us in times of danger. But the husband certainly has the responsibility of looking after his family in a variety of ways.

A Christian husband has the important responsibility of leading his family by encouraging them to fear and obey God. He has a duty to teach his children about the Father and the Son, about God and His way of life, and about keeping the commandments

The Apostle Paul says the husband should deal with his wife as he does with his own flesh, his own body. He does not neglect his own body; he nourishes it and cherishes it.

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Every man has the human desire to preserve his body from harm. And that is the level at which the husband needs to help, protect and provide for his family, and especially his wife, at least as well as he would his own body.

If something comes at him, he throws up his hands and arms to protect himself; and he has the same responsibility to protect his wife (and also his children) from verbal and physical assault by natural and human threats. Let me qualify that statement. I do not believe that a member of God's church should have a gun for protection, or should shoot anyone. We are to avoid killing anyone in that way. But we, as husbands, should be willing to throw our bodies in the way, and die if necessary.

In other words (and, in this sense only) he is the 'savior' of the body. It is important to always take a verse within its context. This is not an isolated independent phrase, true only of Jesus Christ. Paul is still talking about husbands and wives, 'the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.' It is true of both, but on different levels.

But what of the word that is translated 'Therefore' at the beginning of verse 24? Now this is really interesting. According to the best lexicons on the point, it is a Greek word, 'Alla', and it is not always translated as a kind of antithesis, an opposite, and a contrast, as I mentioned earlier that the commentators believe.

The Greek/English Lexicon of the New Testament by Arndt and Gingrich actually says this, that what it really means is 'Now' or 'Then.' It says, 'It is used to strengthen the command,' not to imply a contrast or a difference, to strengthen the very command that he is giving. And it actually picks out Ephesians 5:24, as an illustration of this specific use of the word.

This shows that we must reject the interpretation that says that in this context, this is an independent phrase referring only to Jesus Christ. "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."

The word 'therefore' continues the context that the husband is to be like Christ as head and provider, except it would be on the lesser human level. Ultimately, and at a greater level though, God is the supreme Head and provider with Jesus Christ as Head of God's church.

So the doctrine is clearly this—the wife is the one who is kept, preserved, guarded, shielded, provided for by the husband. That is the relationship—as Christ nourishes and

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cherishes the church, so the husband nourishes and cherishes the wife—and the wife should realize that that is her position in this relationship, and she should help her husband to succeed in this.

Husbands are instructed in Ephesians 5:28-29, to 'nourish and cherish' their wives. The most important nourishment that a husband can provide for his family is spiritual.

Matthew 4:4 Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Husbands should take the lead in encouraging fear of God, obedience to God's laws, Bible study, prayer and activities that please God.

Another kind of nourishment is physical. Men should be the physical providers for their families.

In I Timothy 5:8, the Apostle Paul is speaking specifically of the duty of children toward a widowed mother.

In enforcing that duty, Paul gives the subject, as he often does in similar cases, a general direction, and says that everyone should provide for those who are dependent on them, and that if they do not do this, they have a less impressive sense of the obligations of duty than even the pagan has.

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

The duty is that the person referred to is to think beforehand of the probable needs of his own family, and make arrangements to take care of them. Ultimately, God provides for our needs; that is, He sees beforehand what we will need, and makes arrangements for those needs by planning preparation long before the need arises. This is what God does, and the husband should also.

The food we eat, and the clothing we wear, God foresees we will need, and the arrangement for the supply was made years ago, and to take care of these needs He has been carrying out His providential plans; in the growth of animals; in the formation of fruit, and in the abundant harvest.

So, according to our ability and effort, we are to anticipate what will be the probable needs of our families, and to make arrangements to take care of them. The words "his own," in verse 8, refer to those who are naturally dependent on him, whether living in his own immediate family, or not.

This holds true for our extended family as well. There may be times when many distant relatives are naturally dependent on our aid, besides those who live in our own house. Certainly the way things are going in this nation there will be more and more of that all of the time. I have read from many sources that we should be gathering together some extra food, because the food shortages are definitely coming. This is a way that we husbands can provide for our family during hard times.

Husbands and wives belong to each other.

In I Corinthians 7:4, Paul writes, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." Now there is equality there in scripture.

In agreement with Scripture, the husband must take care of his wife's needs in every way, and the wife must take care of her husband's needs in every way. This should not be an area of neglect. They are to become one literally in physical intercourse, and become one spiritually by obeying Christ's instructions on loving each other.

Since the husband is the preserver and provider (in the lesser physical sense), the wife should act accordingly to work in harmony (not in competition or as an adversary) with the husband.

But we can go further. What is the relationship of the body to the head? What is true of the church in relation to Christ is true of the wife in relation to the husband.

Look at the illustration that Paul uses in Ephesians 5, I Corinthians 12, and in Romans 12.

Christian marriage, between husband and wife, is a type of the marriage between Christ and the church. In I Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul refers to the church as 'one body.' One of the key themes in chapter 12 is unity among people of different personalities.

I Corinthians 12:20-27 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those

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members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

The purpose of the gifts that are given by God is to build one another up and to care for one another, not to flaunt one's own spirituality.

In the variety of the bodily parts there is a corresponding mutual dependence. A person with a seemingly greater gift should not imagine that he or she could function alone since a bodily member cut off from the natural body would cease to exist.

More importantly, if one is thought to possess a lesser gift, he or she should be given greater attention by the other members of the body, just as in the natural body special attention is given to dress those parts of the body deemed less presentable.

God's plan is for members of the spiritual body to demonstrate a mutual concern for the well-being of others so that rivalry ceases; so that there is no division in the body, and genuine unity exists. We see the parallel there of what is required of us members in the church and what is required of us members of the human family.

This is also what is strived for in the Christian marriage and family. The wife is to the husband what the body is to the head, what the church is to Christ. It is the idea of the 'complement' again. The essential thing in the Christian concept of marriage is this idea of wholeness, completeness, and unity.

Genesis 2 establishes the principle - the wife is a helper comparable to her husband. Eve was someone taken out of Adam, a part of him, yes; but complementing him, making up wholeness. That is the idea that you think of inevitably as you think of your body, the body as a whole.

The body is not a collection of parts, not just a number of fingers and hands and feet and toes stuck on, and limbs loosely attached together. That is a completely false view of the body. It is an organic, vital unity; it is one, and it is whole.

Now that is the idea we have here. The husband and wife are not separate; they are not like two kingdoms that have diplomatic relationships, but are always in a state of tension, and always in danger of a quarrel.

That is the opposite of the Christian concept of what a marriage really is. Christ and the church are one as the body and the head are one. In the body there are differing functions, different purposes, and special duties that only each part can perform.

But it is essential that we remember that each part is a part of a whole and that all separate actions are part of a unified action that leads to a mutual result.

But let us work this out in detail a little more in order to further understand this issue of the marriage state and relationship.

It seems that the anti-marriage sentiment today is partly a reaction against that dictatorship type of married life in which many husbands and wives appear to be good Christians, but of whom people say, 'If only you knew them in their private life!'

God's church is greatly harmed when a professing Christian man is not the same at home as he is at church, or in his office, or out in the street. It is in the home you really come to know a man.

These things are important, not only in and of themselves, but as a part of our witness as Christians.

What, then, does this teach us about the relationship of the wife to the husband in this matter of subjecting herself? It seems clear that it does not teach a mere and sheer passivity; the wife is not to be entirely passive. It is a mistranslation of this picture to say that the wife should never speak, never give an opinion, but be mute and completely passive.

That is the exaggeration of an analogy and an illustration to the point at which it becomes meaningless. But what it means is this: the wife should never be guilty of independent action on major issues. The analogy of the body and the head insists on that. The business of my body is not to act independently of me.

'I' am the one who decides to act with my mind and brains and will (speaking of the head). My body is the means through which 'I' express it. If my body begins to act apart from me, I will suffer from some sort of 'convulsions.' This is exactly what 'convulsions' means; that parts of a person's body are moving in an irrational manner—independent

of purpose.

It is not purposeful action; the head does not want them to act, but it cannot stop them; they are acting independently of its mind and will. That causes chaos; that causes convulsions.

God is not the author of confusion; Satan is, and human nature is!

Here is the analogy, 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands; be subject and obedient to them in everything.' Why? Well, because as the wife, and in this marriage relationship, you do not act independently of your husband. If you do, it causes chaos, it causes convulsions.

Or let me divide it up still more. The wife should not act before the husband on major issues. Biblical teaching shows that he is the head; that he ultimately controls the body.

Therefore, the wife not only does not act independently of him on major issues, she does not act before him; it is equally true to say that she should not delay action, she should not stall action, and she must not refuse to act—unless, of course, it goes beyond the laws of God, which should not happen in a truly Christian marriage anyway. I am talking about major decision, of course she should go out and choose the food for the family, and make sure that they are healthy, and the clothing that they buy to make sure that it is modest, and so on and so forth. I am not saying that the wife cannot act at all without the husband, but I am saying that there should not be an independent or an anti-action, especially on major issues.

Let us go back to the analogy of the body. Think of someone who has had a stroke. This person wants to act, but the limb is paralyzed, so he cannot. There is no movement—the arm is not healthy, it resists movement.

Subjection involves the idea that the wife does not act before her husband, nor does she delay, nor does she hinder action, nor does she paralyze action. These points are all essential in this whole marriage relationship; and it is because people do not realize and know these things, that marriage is breaking down around us.

Independence, acting before, not acting, stalling, refusing, are all wrong; and it is all because men and women do not understand the Christian view of marriage.

We can sum it up this way: The initiative and the leadership are ultimately the husband's, but the action must always be coordinated. That is the meaning of this

picture—coordinated action, but leadership is the head.

There is no sense of inferiority suggested by this. The wife is not inferior to her husband; she is different from him. She has her own specific position, full of honor and respect. That is why the husband is later told to cherish, to nourish, to love, to care for, and to respect and honor his wife. There is no inferiority involved. Husband's, I hope that you caught that, that we need to nourish, to love, to care for, to respect and to honor our wives. That is a full plate, and we cannot do it without God's help.

Any Christian woman who realizes all of this will love to please her husband, to be useful to him, to help him, to enable him to function. She will not quibble at saying 'and obey' in the marriage service. What a sad thing this is when they take it out of the marriage ceremony. Right off the bat it is condemning the marriage to trouble. It may last for a term, but will it last till the day that they die? It probably will not.

If they are all playing individually and all have ability, they start off by saying that there is only one man who is captain. Speaking of the wife, she says, 'I am not captain, I am submitting myself to the captain.' That is wonderful, that is the team spirit; each player is going to obey the captain.

But there are those who say you must not say that with regard to marriage! All we have to do is look out at the world, and it is making every effort possible to teach, to push, and to promote the opposite of what I am saying here today. That is the way the world is, they are always contradictory and always opposite of the church's teaching, and of God's teaching, and of His way of life. The world says that it is derogatory to women, that it is old-fashioned, that it is just Paul's opinion, that it is Pharisaical, that it is legalistic, that it is the Old Testament. But that denies the whole doctrine, and is even inconsistent with the whole Bible.

The Christian wife, understanding these things, wants to say, 'to love, cherish and obey.'

Why is she getting married? Is it not in order to produce 'one flesh,' wholeness? Is it not to enjoy this completeness? And, of course, I speak of Christian marriages, because the world has different reasons for why they get married.

That is not slavery; that is living as the church does with respect to her Lord. But let me add something. Did you notice that the end of Paul's exhortation was, in Ephesians 5:24, 'Therefore (then, now then) as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything,'? 'Everything!' That is quite a word and I must explain it. Does it really mean everything?

Here, the answer is again in terms of the analogy of Scripture in its entirety. When the Scripture makes a sweeping general statement like that, it always expects us to interpret it in the light of its own teaching.

So when we read that 'the wife is to be subject to her own husband in everything,' it is the same as saying that the Christian is to be subject to the State, and to the powers that be, as in Romans 13, and in other places.

Does it mean, then, that the wife has to do literally everything her husband tells her to do in all circumstances and conditions? Of course not! That would be to make the Scriptures ridiculous. There are qualifications here. What are they? Here is one: It is a fundamental rule of the Scriptures that nobody should ever act against his or her conscience.

This inspired biblical teaching of submission does not tell a wife that she has to act against her own conscience. Within the conjugal relationship, within the terms of marriage, the husband has no right to dictate to a wife's conscience.

There is a great deal of confusion sometimes between obeying conscience and holding on to an opinion.

They are not the same thing. The Scriptures exhort us to obey conscience when based on biblical principles in all circumstances; but that is not necessarily the same thing as holding on to your own opinion.

We should never violate conscience, but we must be ready to submit in the matter of opinion. The wife's position in the marriage relationship is not to be pressed to the extent of going against her conscience; neither must she allow her husband to make her commit sin.

Romans 14:22-23 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Anything believers do apart from faith is sin, because faith glorifies God by trusting Him, and lack of faith dishonors Him. A Christian must not insist on influencing a believer with a tighter sense of right and wrong to change his ways.

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The principle is, "When in doubt, don't ." The "strong" Christian is wrong if he causes a weak spiritual sister to sin (by doing something while doubting), and a weak spiritual sister who goes against what she doubts also sins.

If the husband is trying to get his wife to commit sin, she must say 'No!' Not to say this—is to make the Scriptures ridiculous. If the husband loses his mental balance and becomes insane, obviously she is not to obey him in everything. I am just giving qualifications of that word 'everything' here. The Scriptures are never ridiculous; they carry their own meaning with them; and there are these inevitable limits.

The next point that I would like to make, is that the wife is not to submit to the husband to the extent of allowing him to interfere with her relationship to God and Jesus Christ. She must do everything short of that, but not that.

The people being addressed in Colossians 3, were believers and the Apostle Paul appealed to all of them to live to please Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:23-25 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

In these verses, Paul made numerous points about the motives, attitudes, and conduct of Christian slaves that are applicable to anyone in submission to another person. Everything we do, we must do to the obedience and to the glory of God, because we must give a true witness of God's way of life as ambassadors of Christ and citizens of heaven.

The next point is that adultery breaks the marriage relationship; and if the husband has been guilty of adultery the wife is no longer bound to give him obedience in everything. She can divorce him; she is allowed to do so by Scripture.

She is entitled to do so, because adultery breaks unity; it breaks the marriage covenant. They are now separate, and no longer one. He has broken the unity; he has gone out of it. A wife should not remain in a dangerous violent situation where she or her children are abused.

So we must not interpret Paul's inspired words as teaching that the wife is irrevocably, inescapably bound to an adulterous husband for the rest of her life. She may choose to

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be— but that is for her to decide with proper counseling.

All I am saying is that Paul's inspired words do not command a wife to remain married to an adulterous husband, or one who persecutes her and does not give her any peace, and does not desire to live with her. In other words, there are definite limits to these matters governed by the standards and rules God has established for marriage.

The main point that is emphasized is that the wife must give great effort in submitting herself to her husband for Christ's sake, for the reasons given, short of violating the principles that we have just been analyzing.

To any wife who is in trouble in this matter let me suggest certain practical helps. If you are in trouble, ask yourself the following questions:

Why did I originally marry this man? What was it? Can that be restored? Is it possible to have peace in our marriage?

Try to re-capture that in the spirit of Christ. 'Ah, but', you say, 'it is impossible, I cannot.' Well then, as a Christian, feel sorry for the man, pray for him. Put into practice the teaching of the Apostle Peter in I Peter 3, where he tells wives so plainly to subject themselves, and not only to those who are Christians:

I Peter 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

Try to put that into practice; try in humility and meekness to win your husband.

I Peter 3:3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

Do all you can, go the limit; go beyond the limit short of these principles. And, finally, to check your attitude, ask yourself this question, "Can I honestly go in my present attitude

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and condition into the presence of God who gave Himself for me?"

If you can face Him you are probably on the right track. But if you feel condemned, in His presence, about your attitude, about your relationship in any aspect, go and put it right. So that when you go back to him again, it will be with a quiet conscience, with a meek and humble spirit, with a contrite heart.

This is a Christian matter; it is like the relationship of the church to Christ, the body to the head. As long as we look at it in those terms there are no unsolvable problems; it is a great privilege; it is something that God looks down upon with pleasure and with delight.

'Wives, submit yourselves'—'a meek and a quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price,' and however much you may have to suffer here in this life, your reward in heaven will be very great!

Simply a man and a woman repeating the marriage vows do not produce oneness in a marriage. Unity is produced by husband and wife obeying God's instructions on loving their neighbor as themselves.

Just about all marital problems stem from one partner, or the other, or both, trying to get something from the other by expressing a selfish attitude.

Some couples are able to maintain a precarious balance as long as each spouse feels that he or she is giving, but such an explosive situation certainly does not reflect the type of selflessness, outgoing love and concern that should be present in a Christian marriage.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Nothing pleases God more than His children being at one with Him and their neighbors. God expresses His pleasure this way through King David.

Psalms 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Husbands and wives must dwell together in unity! They must never forget that they are

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neighbors, and in a Christian marriage that they are brethren.

Nothing will give husbands and wives more satisfaction and pleasure than dwelling together in peace. Peace and unity should be the goal. When you go to bed at night, and reflect on the events of the day, and you know you are at peace with your wife, your children and your neighbors, you experience great joy.

You may be sick, or your family may be in great physical distress, but if you are at one with God and neighbor, God will supply the courage and resolve to gain the victory over trial and tribulation.

Husbands and wives should be best friends. You should be married to the person that you want to spend the most time with, other than God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times...." Marriage is not a master-slave relationship. With regard to Christ's relationship to those who 'fear the Lord,' He said:

John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

We must learn from Christ's example. Husbands and wives should be constantly communicating with each other and building their friendship. Proverbs 27:9 says, "...the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel," The friendship of a wife who gives good advice brings happiness. Teamwork is a sacrifice that pleases God; and God wants us to be living sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:16-17 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Here submission to leaders is directly commanded. Such obedience will benefit those who submit, since those submitting will be cared for, and there will be harmony and joy in their mutual responsibilities. The leaders are also reminded that they will give an account to God. There again, we see that the husbands' responsibility is not to be taken lightly. It is a leadership responsibility, and it is judged more harshly.

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This principle certainly applies to Christian marriage and family life; and God reminds the leader (that is the husband and father) that he will be judged on how well, or how badly, that he performs his leadership responsibility.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

We are all being trained to be leaders (kings and priests) in God's kingdom.

It requires time and effort to communicate and work with your spouse. It is often much too easy to simply withdraw into the recesses of our own minds—to turn off and ignore everything around us. But that is self-centered, and that is wrong, it is the sin of neglect.

Such selfishness will always lead to problems of neglect. Married couples should talk often, and spend a great deal of time with one another, lest they be strangers to each other.

Notice how important communication between God's children really is:

Malachi 3:16-17 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate [margin: esteem]on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels [margin: special treasure]. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

Are you and your husband or wife in this special book of God's? Are you becoming His special treasure, His jewels? How much do you really communicate with each other?

The most important step overall is staying close to God. This means maintaining oneness of purpose—and that purpose is serving God with all of your being and preparing for positions of leadership and service in the kingdom of God. Remember, the body must have oneness of purpose to function successfully and without convulsing.

Staying close to God also requires constant repentance. Nearly all marital problems spring from breaking spiritual laws. We must repent, become more deeply converted and humble ourselves as little children so God can live in our marriages. We need to

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pray as David prayed for a clean heart and a right spirit.

Is your marriage all that it could be—all that it should be? God will help you.

The Apostle James says, 'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.'

The Apostle John says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' You could add in there, all problems in marriage.

The storms of today's world that beat so heavily on marriage can be weathered. Our homes and our marriages can be filled with the fruit of God's Spirit, if we will submit to God and to one another in love.