

The Mystery of Marriage

Part Two

A teaching on God-appointed, Christ-centered marriages

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I make no claim to having a perfect marriage. I simply share what I believe the Lord has made real to me regarding His heart for marriage. I submit this teaching for your discernment and edification.

A God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage is a type of the relationship between Christ and His Bride. Paul, the apostle, called this a mystery. Eph. 5:32a.

The Bible from the beginning to the end declares God's intent for marriage. The story in the Bible begins and ends with a marriage. It begins with the union between Adam and Eve and ends with the marriage of Christ and His Bride, the *ekklesia*.¹

The biblical picture of Christ and His Bride shows us what a God-appointed, Christ-centered marriage is to look like. Conversely, marriage should show what Christ and His Bride look like. They mirror each other.

Husbands are a type of Christ and are to picture Christ-likeness to their wives and to the world. Wives are a type of the Bride of Christ and are to picture that image to their husbands and to the world.

The marriage between a husband and his wife is a picture of Christ and His Bride even to the tradition of the woman taking her husband's name. God has a people who are called by His name. 2 Chronicles 7:14; Daniel 9:19; and Acts 15:17. As His Bride and members of His body, true believers take on His name. He does not take on our names. We are a people who are called by His name.

Paul explains this rather poetically, in Ephesians 5:22-33. Let us take this passage line upon line. Liberty has been taken to arrange the statements together that pertain to each other.

A. "Wives submit," v. 22a

Since Paul mentions the wives first, we shall start there as well. He exhorts them to submit to their husbands.

¹ *Ekklesia* is normally translated *church*, but literally translates into English, *called-out-ones*.

The word submit is from a Greek word that means: put under, be subject unto, submit one's self to, be in subjection or under. It is a Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader." In the nonmilitary use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."

True submission is voluntary. You cannot force submission. Forced submission is oppression. The Lord is neither interested in inflicting hardship or constraint upon women nor allowing them to suffer oppression. Godly submission does not make a wife a second-class citizen any more than one having to submit to a boss at work, to governing authorities, or to an airline attendant. Godly submission is a blessing whether in marriage or elsewhere in our lives.

Husbands are not superior to their wives. They are not the boss of their wives. Gentlemen, get that out of your thinking. It is wrong and counterproductive for husbands to suppress their wives because they do not "submit." This is abusive. A man who treats his wife this way is possibly more interested in her being his slave rather than his wife.

Submission is best understood as receiving. When you recognize that God has given you a gift through the life and ministry of another, it is to your advantage to receive that gift. Reaching out to receive the gift is an act of submitting. Refusal to receive the gift of God through another person is an act of rebellion. Submissive wives receive the gift of God through their husbands.

The Kingdom principle that we are to "submit one to another" is particularly important in the marriage. Each of us have different gifts of the Spirit. We need to recognize those in each other and receive from each other. I have the gift of knowledge and my wife has the gift of wisdom. Many times I seem to know something, but do not know what to do with that knowledge. I turn to my wife and say, "Wisdom, what am I to do with this knowledge?" I am rarely disappointed in her response. In that regard and to that degree, I submit to her. Headship is my gift to her. Submission is her gift to me. Together we fulfill God's ministry in our marriage. It has to do with gifting and function and not with hierarchy.

B. "Submit to your own husbands," v. 22b

Wives are not to submit to another man's authority, not even to their so-called "pastor." No other man has authority over another man's wife.

Paul made this emphatically clear in 1 Corinthians 11:3 "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." The flow chart is simple. God is the head of Jesus. Jesus is the head of the man. The man is the head of the woman.

This principle of headship applies to the whole family as stated in Colossians 3:18-20. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

Imagine standing under the waterfall of God's provisions. When the man stands under his head, Jesus, he receives the flow of blessings from the Father through Him. When the woman stands under the headship of her husband, she receives the flow of God's blessings through him.

If the man steps out from under the flow of God's order, he misses the blessing of the Father intended for him and neglects his responsibility to cover (protect) His wife.

However, if the wife remains faithful to the principle of headship and honors her husband regardless of his rebellion, the Lord will still honor and bless her. When the wife submits to her husband in this godly manner, she draws the anointing through him much like turning on a water faucet. Even he will receive the life of the anointing that flows through him whether he realizes it or not.

My wife has rightly said that it is not me she is trusting when she submits to me. She is trusting Christ and His anointing through me. She is submitting to a higher law than me just as we would if stopped by the traffic police. The police person may be personally corrupt, but that officer represents a higher authority, and it is to that we submit.

This scripture does not place any qualification upon the headship of the man to his wife. It does not say, "submit if he is a spiritual person," or "submit if he can be trusted." The wife does not have the luxury of being submissive to her husband only when it suits her, but "in everything." "Therefore as the *ekklesia* [Bride] is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Eph. 5:24. However, God would not require her to do anything that is immoral, unscriptural, or illegal.

If, however, the wife does not submit for other reasons, she misses the joy of receiving the grace of God through him. This flow cascades from God, through Christ to the man, on to the wife, and even onto the children.

God-fearing husbands who have rebellious wives need to ask, "What would Jesus do?" What is Jesus doing presently in the face of His rebellious wife? Through the person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is loving His bride into holiness. Headship can never be about the husband. It always has to be what is in the best interest of his wife.

Submission is an attitude of the heart, 1 Peter 3:1-6. It comes from the beauty within the person. It flows from the inside out. Surface submission is phony.

Submission is not the same as obedience. We can obey someone on the outside and still be rebellious on the inside—like the little boy who was told to sit down. He answered, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I am still standing up on the inside.”

Submission recognizes that the husband is the head of his wife. They are one flesh, but he is the authority; she marries him; takes his name.

She gives all of herself, but she is not an abuse-taker. She gives all of herself, but she is not diminished as a person.

She has eyes for him only. An adulterous heart goes after other loves. She is a bride in waiting and makes herself ready. Rev. 19:7-9.

C. “As unto the Lord” v.22

The wife is to submit to her husband as though she were submitting to the Lord Jesus Himself. The picture carries through here, working both ways. The way we treat each other is how we treat Christ. Jesus said, “...inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” Matt. 25:40. Jesus asked Paul on the road to Damascus why he was persecuting Him. Acts 9:4. Jesus was in heaven. How could Paul be persecuting Him? Persecuting the saints was the same as persecuting Jesus. We are one with Him—He in us and we in Him. The husband and wife, likewise, are one flesh. The way we treat our mates is how we are treating Jesus. Would we not want to re-evaluate how we treat each other in the marriage and the home?

V. 33b “...and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” The word respect is from the Greek word that we use for phobia. While it has to do with fear, it also has to do with showing reverence, treating with deference or reverential obedience. This second meaning is more in keeping with the spirit of this passage in Ephesians as a whole. She respects and honors him. He is the Christ figure in the home and she respects him as such. She calls that forth in him. She teaches her children to honor and respect their father.

Wives can revere their husbands when they see that in doing so it is as “unto the Lord.”

D. “For the husband is head of the wife” V. 23

The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of His bride, the *ekklesia*.

The word *ekklesia* in the Greek is feminine. In this context, it refers to God's people—the Bride of Christ. Even in verse 25 below, the King James Version of the Bible and other versions miss the translation where it reads, “...and gave Himself for *it*.” Therefore, in keeping with the spirit and intent of this passage, it should read, *her*. The New King James Version has corrected this.

Verse 23 explains why this headship principle is so vital in a Christ-centered marriage. Husbands are the head of their wives, even as Christ is head of His assembly of called-out-ones.

Rewind for a moment to submission: Imagine the Bride of Christ usurping the headship of Christ. But wait! Isn't that what she has done, to the disgrace of this heavenly marriage? Unfortunately, the Bride of Christ today is in rebellion to her head. She has multiple heads in His place—her own willfulness, the false authority of church leaders, the headship of men over men, and seeking the preeminence of men. Christ alone is the head of His assembly.

In this same way, the husband is the head of his marriage. As such, the marriage is his area of administration, his jurisdiction. He is the authority figure in that marriage. Authority carries with it responsibility. We cannot have one without the other. Any responsibility that you have been given should carry with it the authority to perform headship function. Responsibility without authority is powerless. Authority without responsibility is dangerous. There are boundaries to authority. Every husband needs to know the parameters of his authority as the head of his wife and household; where it begins and where it ends.

Many people teach and think that this teaching on male headship is sexist, that it suggests men are superior to the women, and that women need to be liberated from it. Quite the contrary. The husband, as head, is a servant to his wife. If your definition of headship and submission does not liberate your wife, it is not true.

Men who do not understand the nature of this marital authority will overstep, abdicate, or resort to force. This idea of authority in headship is not authoritarianism. The husband is not the dictator in the home. He is not the master and his wife his servant. He is not superior in any way to His wife. The idea that even Jesus makes us one with Him is an unimaginable reality. To be the head of your wife is to be her shepherd. Another word for shepherd is husbandry or husbandman—one who give care and guidance. The wife is the husband's lead sheep. The job description of every faithful husband (shepherd) is to cover, protect, lead, feed, tend, and heal his wife.

Husbands, since Jesus is your head, go to Him for headship matters. Do not submit to another person as your head. Be faithful to do as His Holy Spirit leads you. His leading will always be the right thing to do. This does not void the principle, however, that we are to submit one to another. 1 Peter 5:5. Submitting to other trusted brethren for confirmation, support, and wisdom, does not make them your head.

Traditionally, the young suitor of a man's daughter asks the father for his daughter's hand in marriage. He does this because the father is the covering for his daughter as he is for all of his children.

The father of the bride walks the bride down the aisle, for this is symbolic of his relationship with her. When asked, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man,” traditionally, the father says, “I do.” More recently, the father may say, “Her mother and I.” Scripturally, the father as the head of the house is the covering for his wife and children. He has been his daughter’s covering all of her life. It should remain so as long as she remains single. Then, at this juncture in the wedding ceremony, he hands his daughter to the protective covering of this other man who is to become her head in Christ. Then, the father steps back.

This is pictured in the relationship between Christ and His bride. The Bride of Christ is given to Him by the Father. Jesus declared, “Whom the Father has given Me.” He further clarified, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” John 6:37-39.

Jesus also said, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” John 17:12. And again He said, “That the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.’” John 18:9.

E. “Husbands love your wives” v. 25

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the *ekklesia*, and gave Himself for her.” This statement contains the essence of what true headship means. Husbands need to understand this!

In many respects it may be easier for a wife to submit to her husband than for the husband to love his wife as he should. He is to love his wife as Christ loves His bride. Christ’s kind of love compelled Him to give Himself up for her—to die for her sake.

The word for love that is used here in the Greek is *agape*. It has to do with the unconditional, sacrificial giving of oneself for what is in the best interest of the other. Jesus explained it this way: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13. He gave ultimate interpretation to this kind of love by the unconditional, sacrificial giving of His own life that we might be saved.

This servant kind of love does not demand to be served in return. Big difference! The husband who can in all honesty say, “I give my life for my wife” stands tall among the best of godly men.

Also, note there are no conditions put upon this command to love; such as, “Love your wife, provided that she submits.”

F. “That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word” v. 26

This statement is a challenge for most men even when they know what it means. Nevertheless, we must learn how to do this if we are to love our wives unconditionally and sacrificially, as Christ loves His bride. You can often tell how a man treats his wife by how well she thrives.

The word sanctify in the Greek is best understood as “separate” or to “set apart.” It is also the word that has been translated “holy.” It is the husband’s responsibility to minister to his wife in such a way as to keep her separated, set apart, holy unto the Lord.

To cleanse with the washing of water by the word simply means that the husband is a Word-man. He knows the living word of God for himself and seeks the Holy Spirit for a timely word for his wife. That word will have life and power when spoken in the Spirit of God. It will sanctify (separate) and cleanse her. It provides her with a protective covering. Wives ordinarily love it when their husbands wash them with the water of the word. They should want to sit at his feet and have him lay hands on her head to protect her from the evil one, especially from the snare of a Jezebel spirit that would like to usurp the husband’s headship.

G. “that she should be holy and without blemish.” v. 27

Moreover, as it is with Christ, husbands will want to do such a fine work on their wives that they will be able to present her to Christ as a glorious bride without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she be holy and without blemish. This is the husband’s job. Whether she responds to it or not is not the husband’s problem. Unconditional love is just that. Unconditional. “I will love you, dearest, if...” is conditional. To abdicate because she does her own thing is conditional. Love never fails.

H. “...his own wife...” v. 33

“Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself.” The husband is the faithful and responsible head of his wife and his alone. Christ is the head of His body (His Bride). In like manner, husbands are the heads of their wives. Conversely, the Bride of Christ has only one head, Christ. The wife, as a type of the Bride of Christ, has only one head, her husband.

A man is never to usurp the authority of headship over another man’s wife. Nor is he to permit another man to usurp his authority of headship over his own wife. He uncovers her when he does so.

Husbands can and should, however, counsel each other in how to be a better husband and dad.

I. “Love her as his own body” v. 28-32

“So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” Why? Because we are one flesh with our mates! “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the *ekklesia*.” A man would be considered psychotic if he beat himself every time he made a mistake. Why then get violent or punitive with your wife who is one flesh with you? The Holy Spirit here is emphasizing the reality of how we two are one flesh. We need to really believe that.

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” Matthew 19:5. You are one flesh with your mate.

If wives do not learn God’s order for divine submission to their husbands in all things, they will not only dishonor their husbands, but also Christ. They rob themselves of the flow of God’s grace, and paint an erroneous picture of Christ and His Bride.

If husbands do not learn God’s order for divine headship, they not only dishonor their wives, but also the body of Christ. They, too, rob themselves of the flow of God’s grace, and paint an erroneous picture of the Christ and His Bride.

J. “A Great mystery” v. 32a

“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the *ekklesia*.” This mystery is two directional. It has to do with the relationship between Christ and His Bride as well as with the relationship between a husband and his wife.

This whole idea of headship and submission as it pictures Christ and His Bride is difficult to comprehend and even more difficult to act upon. It does not square with the reality of our present cultures. We brush it off as, “Well that was then. Things are different today.”

In so doing, we miss the beauty of this great mystery. It remains a mystery only to those who refuse to believe. It becomes revelation to those who choose to believe.

Without this foundational understanding of the spiritual significance of headship and submission, there is little hope of getting right the entirety of this teaching.

K. A matter of function

This picture of headship and submission in Ephesians 5 is a reflection of themes. On the one side, it pictures how the relationship between Christ and His Bride should be and, on the other side, it pictures how the

relationship between husbands and wives should be. They mirror each other.

This picture of Christ and His Bride helps explain why Paul would make such a radical statement in 1 Timothy 2:12 saying, “I do not allow a woman to teach or usurp authority² over a man.” The word authority used here has to do with exercising dominion over another.

Can you imagine the Bride of Christ ever exercising authority (dominion) over Christ? Yet, in so many marriages, we see the woman usurping the headship of the man, seeking dominion. It portrays an out-of-order relationship in the body of Christ.

This headship and submission principle, when it flows in the spirit of Christ and His Holy Spirit is a beautiful thing. It releases the flow of God’s blessings upon the marriage.

If a woman feels in bondage or as though she is a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God, something is out of godly order. A woman should feel safe and honored in this divine arrangement. It is a matter of function.

God anoints His order of things. His blessings flow down through His order. Anything other than God’s order is devoid of His blessings.

Husband, do not uncover yourself. Stay under the authority of Christ. Do not uncover your wife through immoral behavior, financial irresponsibility, mental or physical abuse, or any such rebellious behavior.

Wives, do not uncover yourself by stepping outside of God’s order.

Learn what is your function in the marriage and stay within that boundary. It settles most arguments in the home.

L. The Adam and Eve Syndrome

God created Adam and gave him the authority in the garden. He is expected to stand up and exercise the authority given to him by his creator. Eve, on the other hand was given to Adam as his helpmate. She was not given the authority in the garden.

However, it appears to be Adam’s nature to step back and abdicate his God-given authority. Furthermore, it appears to be Eve’s nature to step up when Adam steps back. When this happens, the serpent is given legal right to step in. I call this the Adam and Eve Syndrome. By nature, men are often quick to abdicate their responsibilities. They flee, creating a vacuum that sucks the woman into the lead. It is time for men to step

² From the Greek *authenteo*. Having to do with usurping authority over: 1) one who with his own hands kills another or himself 2) one who acts on his own authority, autocratic 3) an absolute master 4) to govern, exercise dominion over one.

up and exercise the leadership authority they have been given as husbands and fathers in the home.”

This is acutely illustrated in the life and times of King Ahab in Israel and his wife, Jezebel. 1 Kings 21. Ahab's palace was next door to Naboth's vineyard which had been in Naboth's family for generations. Ahab decided he wanted it for his vegetable garden. When Naboth refused to sell it to him, Ahab whined, but Jezebel stealthily obtained it for Ahab. She orchestrated Naboth's false conviction and execution. This is the personification of the “Jezebel spirit.”

Men have to take the initiative themselves to step up into their role as the husband. They learn from the Father through the Holy Spirit how to be response-able husbands. Wives cannot make their husbands “man up.” Wives who try to get their husbands to take the lead can easily become manipulative.

Unfortunately, history has not favored women. Disenfranchised. Unequal pay for equal work. Disallowed to vote. Not allowed to own property. Treated as second class.

However, overreacting to these atrocities in the world systems has left consequences that are also unfavorable to women. It has given rise to the Feminist movement in modern times and given impetus to this Adam and Eve Syndrome. It is false liberation. It has done nothing to make women more feminine. In extreme cases, women become men haters and bashers, even masculine in character.

None of this prevails in the Kingdom of God. His divine order is glorious and edifying. Reach out and embrace the pattern God set forth in His divine word.

“Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” v. 33.