

Ephesians 5:21-24 "The Role Of The Wife"

**Ephesians 5:21-24** <sup>21</sup> and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.

In our text this morning we want to be sure to keep it in its context. The context has to do with walking in a way that honors Christ. Paul puts it this way in EPH 5:15 "Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise,..."

The wisdom which every believer should be practicing should have as its foundation the living word of God which reveals the mind and will of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, it's important that we gain this wisdom from the knowledge we find in the word.

But there is a danger if our knowledge and doctrine isn't found to work in real life. The world has accused the church of not relating to real life situations. And in many cases they have a point as the church has had a tendency to show itself as some sort of exclusive spiritual club with no apparent attachment to this planet.

The fact of the matter is that even though we are commanded not to be of the world we are still in the world and our faith is to be working in this world to the degree that all men everywhere see Christ in our lives. And by that we mean every aspect of our lives.

If our faith doesn't touch real life than we could hardly call our faith real. And I believe the world appreciates the fact that Christians can be real people. Simply because we come to faith in Christ doesn't mean that the Lord takes our personalities away or turns us into some sort of being which is enabled to float 4 feet above the ground never touching down in this world.

This doesn't mean that we imitate the world but rather influence the world in a way where the world desires to know the God who has given us life eternal; a life which positively effects our present life.

And one of the most real aspects of life is found in a relationship which every person on the planet is effected by, either directly or indirectly: marriage. Paul realizes that this relationship was given

by God Himself back in the Garden of Eden. And his intent in our passage is to show how a restored relationship to Christ is to affect our relationships with one another.

Last week we looked at how being filled with the Spirit, which is being directed by the Spirit, and submitting to the Spirit, will affect the heart of a believer to the degree that we will worship the Lord with our entire being. This in turn will enable us to encourage each other in our faith.

EPH 5:19-20 "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In giving thanks to God it is implied that we will show appreciation for one another as we build each other up in the faith. And Paul brings this out in our text this morning.

EPH 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

The idea of submitting to one another is to consider each other in a way where we are willing to be servants. And we see this in a variety of places in the Scriptures.

MAT 20:26-28 "..... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

At the last supper Jesus was showing His disciples through washing their feet that even the Master was willing to humble Himself to meet the needs of His people. We too need to be willing to wash each other's feet in a sense as we are there to meet even the most basic needs of each other, including those spiritual needs to grow in Christ.

And this is why Paul adds to that exhortation to "submit to one another", the phrase, "in the fear or reverence of Christ."

All that we do should be done in a way that considers our God and Savior. The idea of fearing Christ really means to consider the awesome God that He is and out of reverence for Him we desire to please Him in all things, including submitting to one another. Paul brings this out when writing to the Christians in Rome.

ROM 12:10-13 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal,

but keep your spiritual fervor, *servicing the Lord*. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Here Paul equates serving the Lord with being devoted to one another in brotherly love. We see this again in the letter to the Colossians.

COL 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, *as working for the Lord, not for men*, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. ***It is the Lord Christ you are serving.***"

And so, with that backdrop we come to our text and hopefully we begin to realize that our relationship to each other in the body of Christ is meant to be one where we serve one another, but more important, that we realize that we are really serving Christ.

And if we are really serving Christ then how we serve each other will be effected by that realization. But here's where Paul puts the rubber to the road. Because his Theology does in fact effect real life. And there's nothing more real than the person you're married to.

EPH 5:22 "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."

From here to the end of this letter Paul is going to address relationships within the family and within the body of Christ and how we are to view these relationships to the glory of God.

Now, for a lot of women, both inside and outside the visible church, this verse is loaded with negative connotation, and yet it doesn't have to be. The feminist movement in this country has labeled the apostle Paul a chauvinist male who only wants to put women down. The truth is that Paul is trying to elevate women back to their proper role in the marriage relationship.

Keep in mind that when Paul was writing this letter, most of the Roman empire viewed women as below the status of slaves. They essentially had no rights. The husband had total control of them and if he decided that his wife was not living up to his expectations he had every legal right to divorce her. If she found herself divorced, in many cases, she had to sell herself into slavery to be able to support herself and possibly her children.

In a variety of cases the husband even had the power of life and death over his wife. Women were not second class citizens. That

would have been a step up. Even today in the Muslim world, for example, women are treated as dirt and have no rights whatsoever. Where is the outcry from the feminists for these women?

Paul realizes God's grand plan for the wife in the marriage relationship. He realizes that women are to be placed in their proper role so that they can flourish in that relationship and honor God in the process.

Unfortunately, many people, including some Christians, don't understand the biblical role for women, and that includes both men and women. It seems when the word subject or submission is used, as it relates to women in a marriage relationship, there is this automatic barrier which is thrown up.

What the bible teaches is that this is not some sort of barrier, but a bridge to enable the relationship to grow and mature in the love of Christ.

Let's take a closer look at our text.

EPH 5:22 "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."

The first thing you would notice if you were to read this verse in the original Greek is that the word submit is nowhere found in this verse. But the way the Greek language is written the entire context is inferring it.

Remember, the previous verse reads, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (EPH 5:21)

The word submit here in this verse could also be literally translated: to arrange under, to subordinate. In the same context when the wife enters the picture the thought Paul had in mind is that each person is to be arranged toward each other in their proper role.

And so when he moves to the marriage relationship it is quite natural to infer that the wife is to be "arranged under", or submitting to her husband in her proper role. And the rest of the context from verse 22 to 33 clearly brings this out. But how is the wife to subject herself to her husband?

EPH 5:23-24 "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

Paul is laying out the proper role for the wife in a marriage relationship, as well as the proper role of the husband. First, you'll notice that the husband is described as the head of the wife as Christ is also the head of the church. Now, this is not meant to be taken as a one-to-one correspondence.

Christ is God and Creator, man is not. Christ is truly perfect and our sacrifice for sin, man is not. And so when Paul makes this comparison he's not suggesting that the husband is the absolute ruler and perfect king in that relationship.

What Paul is describing is the role of one who has been given authority as it relates to each office. For Christ He is the ultimate ruler and King over His church which He purchased with His blood. All authority has been given to Him. For the husband, Christ has given him an authority as it relates to his role in that marriage relationship. And the authority has to do with being the one responsible for making sure the wife is able to perform her biblical roles and also making sure that the marriage is moving God-ward.

But, along with that, the husband is to be the protector and provider in that family as Christ is the protector and provider for His church. In other words, the husband is to be looking out for the welfare of his wife and children; physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Now the question needs to be asked, how is the church to be subject to Christ? And depending on how we answer that will determine how the wife is to subject herself to her husband. Again, keep in mind that the word subject is to arrange oneself under someone else in the biblical sense.

To go beyond the biblical arranging is to turn something good into something bad. The way in which we are to subject ourselves to Christ is to realize that He is our leader as well as Savior. This is why we are constantly told to follow Christ. That implies that He is our shepherd.

In a similar way, wives must realize that Christ has given authority to the husband, not to be a tyrant, but a leader. The kind of leader which must be patterned after Christ who loved us unto death and led in a way so as to draw us close to the Father. But as a leader this authority from Christ must be taken seriously by the husband.

Authority is one of those things which does not determine whether or not someone is better than someone else. It simply means that some are given duties which others may not share in. And with those duties comes the power to carry them out.

For example, if you've ever been in the military you know that when a superior officer gives an order you are obliged to obey it. This doesn't mean that a Sergeant or a General is better than a private. It simply means that someone has to rule and take the responsibility in that organization so that things run smoothly and work successfully.

In a similar way, in a marriage relationship someone needs to be the one who has the final obligation to make sure that the marriage is moving in the right direction as the blueprint for that relationship is followed.

The blueprint is the word of God. But unlike a non-Christian marriage which could also follow the blueprint, the Christian marriage is not simply following rules and regulations. It is following a person. That person is the Head of the Body who loved us and died for us and who supplies agape love with which to fulfill our roles, regardless of any negative feelings or circumstances.

And so, when the husband is given that responsibility to rule well in that family he is to use, as his guide, the one who guides the church in love. What Paul is doing is helping the wife to see that the husband does not have any authority that has not been given him by God Himself.

But the authority which is given to the husband is still subject to Jesus Christ. But it is real none the less. The creator of the universe has placed in the hands of the husband the responsibility to lead in that family. That can be pretty scary.

"A home without a head is an invitation to chaos." (William Hendriksen) But a home with a proper head is never meant to be a burden to the wife or the family.

In fact, the head in the home is to actually take that burden on his shoulders to make sure his wife can meet the needs of the members of that home without losing her mind in the process. And this is where the context of our passage is so important. Remember, we're told to be filled, (which implies yielded), with the Spirit in Eph.5:18.

For a husband to approach this task of being a godly leader in the home he must continually be seeking the things of the Spirit. To lead in the flesh is a recipe for disaster, at least in the sense of what a biblical marriage relationship is to be like so that it honors Christ, who is the head of the church.

Now, there are often a couple of problems for the wife which can arise in a Christian home. One problem is that the husband is not assuming his godly responsibility as Christ would have him and therefore the wife feels the obligation to assume his role.

The other problem is that some men have simply misunderstood their role and have assumed an authority which doesn't belong to them. Let me try and give you a couple of examples for each.

Some men don't like the idea of being leaders. Some men don't like the idea of making certain decisions which might determine the direction for that family. If I can use an expression we've all heard, they don't like wearing the pants in that family, which means someone else has to take up that responsibility.

Many wives are then forced to assume a role which was not designed for them by God when both the husband and wife are part of the family. The wife often feels obligated to pick up the slack and in the process certain burdens are placed on her shoulders which over time can begin to weigh her down and create problems in the marriage itself.

That's one scenario. Another scenario is where the wife prefers to be the leader in that family and assumes the role of the husband often squeezing him out of the picture in a variety of ways. In both cases God would say to both the husband and the wife, 'you need to get back to a biblical authority in that relationship.'

This doesn't mean that the wife cannot be given authority and responsibility in that relationship by the husband. There are many cases in which a division of labor is wise and biblical. The wife may be more adept to keeping the finances. And as long as the husband is agreeable to that arrangement it doesn't have to be unbiblical. But the wife is not the one who is ultimately responsible for the finances of that family. Those decisions rest on the shoulders of the husband who can share that with his wife.

And so, even those decisions can be determined with the input of the wife. You see, many people today believe that a woman in

submission to her husband is a woman who has no input at all in some of these decisions. That's simply not the case.

The wife often times has a great deal of wisdom and she should be able to voice her concerns. And husbands would be wise to consider them. If the two of you are not in agreement, it may be wise to pray and wait before making any major decisions.

Remember, that in the beginning when God created the woman for the man we are told in GEN 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

A wife is meant to be a helper. That may be different from being the leader, but in helping she should be able to assist her husband to see things that he may not have considered. But after the counsel she gives and after any help she can render, the final decision needs to be placed on the leader, whom God says is the husband. And in some cases that decision may involve deferring to the wife to take on certain responsibilities in that marriage relationship.

But this is where the second problem sometimes rears an ugly head. The husband may feel that the wife has no business getting involved in his decision making for the family and instead of being a good manager he turns into a Mussolini. And that's not good either.

There needs to be a balance. The wife is a tremendous help to her husband, but only as she is able to support him in a way where she recognizes his responsibility and authority given to him from God. But on the flip-side of that coin the husband must realize that his authority and responsibility must be carried out in the same fashion as Christ gave Himself for the church.

The roles must not be reversed. Now, there may certainly be a changing in roles for women who have children but who do not have a husband for whatever reason. And there may even be a crossing of certain roles in a situation where the husband gives up his responsibility to God to lead.

In that case, however, the wife must be vigilant to trust and obey God in that situation and pray for her husband and support and encourage him to fulfill his role before Christ. Her first course of action should never be to usurp that role. And as often as possible



help him to take that role seriously enough to get back on track and assume his responsibility.

I might add, that this should be done primarily by her Godly behavior and obedience to Christ to fulfill her role, trusting God to work in her husband's heart. Not by nagging but by being the example. This would also be true of a wife married to an unbeliever.

God's word is clear. Wives be subject to your husbands. But there is something else that must never be separated from that command. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."

This is an element in the Christian home that is vital. Wives must understand that in honoring and respecting your husband it is really honoring and respecting your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And this is where being a wife becomes an act of worship. Not worshipping your husband but worshipping your God who has placed you in that relationship.

And so, what happens is that being a wife is really seen as a ministry to your husband and to your Lord as you be that helper to him that the Lord wants you to be, not blurring the roles but helping your husband be the leader and manager of that family in a way that encourages spiritual growth.

And in the case of the husband being an unbeliever, that he would be drawn toward Christ through your faithfulness and love of Christ. Because when you help your husband become the leader in that family you in turn will be blessed and helped by him to be a better wife and mother or grandmother.

But again, we must keep this whole discussion in the context of the comparison Paul makes here in this letter. He is making a solemn comparison between Christ as head of the body and the husband as head of his wife. But in being the head of the wife he is really placing her in a role of honor.

No one but the Church is given the privilege to carry out the will of their Savior. In a similar way, no one but the wife is able to carry out the responsibilities in that family that belong to her. In a sense the husband, as the head, is a crown for his wife. What this means is that she is not his slave-girl, but his queen. And in the following week I'll address the men when it comes to the way in which they serve their wives.

Before we close this morning let me bring up one more question which has been asked by wives for centuries. What if my husband is not doing his job, can I still subject myself to him?

Again, the Scriptures do not qualify the responsibility of the wife to submit to his authority. This doesn't mean that a wife has to be a door-mat or that she must submit to him when she is told to violate the word and will of God. In certain cases we are to obey God rather than man. But again, we don't want to look for excuses not to submit. And sometimes that's what's really going on.

I have found over the years that some wives simply don't want to submit in any form, which is a real shame because it invariably leads to all sorts of problems. I've got a feeling that Solomon, with his many wives and concubines, knew first-hand what this was all about.

PRO 25:24 "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."

In an earlier Proverb he goes a little further. PRO 21:19 "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife."

There are those who would say Solomon deserved what he got by taking so many women, which was contrary to the word of God, and that may be so. But, truth is truth. However, I would add to that that living with a man who doesn't or won't understand his role as defined by God can be very frustrating for his wife and cause her to become contentious.

God is the one who created both man and woman. It is God who ultimately knows best what roles are best suited for the husband and the wife. To choose to go contrary to His will is not only to dishonor our spouses, but to actually dishonor our God.

The Lord has loved us enough to give each person in a marriage relationship a help mate. The least we could do is to take His lead and become the best servants in that relationship so that we can honor one another as well as honor our Lord who loved us and created the marriage relationship which is to reflect the relationship Christ has with His church.

Husbands cherish your wives. Wives honor your husbands as unto the Lord. And when we get together again we'll look at this marriage relationship and the other responsibilities the husband has in that relationship.

But keep this in mind, whether you're a man or a woman, a husband or a wife, we are to be servants one to another.

PHI 2:3-8 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross."

A servants heart, that's what the Lord wants from each of us. Whoever would be least is greatest in the kingdom of God.