Core Seminars—Marriage and Courtship

Week 4

# Biblical Theology of Marriage Part 3

*Redemption*

## Introduction

During the last two weeks, we took a look at the first two elements in a biblical theology of marriage: Creation and the Fall. This week we want to think about the third element in a biblical theology: *redemption*.

Remember our two big goals for marriage: (1) the horizontal goal. Becoming “one flesh” -- union, oneness or the two becoming one are all ways to describe “one flesh”; (2) the vertical goal. Letting our marriage be a display of the relationship between Christ and his church through our marriages. We want our marriages to be portrait of this larger theological truth. Last week we focused a lot on the horizontal goal. Today, we’re focusing on the vertical.

Today we are going to think about Christ and his relationship with his bride, the church. In looking at Christ and the church, we will learn a lot more about biblical marriages than if we had only thought about human marriage by itself.

With that in mind, let’s read the key text for this class: Ephesians 5:21-33. **(READ)** Let’s look at 8 ideas that will hopefully teach us what it means to be a husband and a wife:

1. ***This passage is founded upon the expectation that all Christians should live in humility.***

Before Paul writes about the specific responsibilities of husbands and wives (and indeed for children and parents, and servants and masters as well), he reminds Christians in verse 21 of the general principle that they are to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

That word “submit” means something like “voluntarily yielding in love.” At one level, all Christians are to show that kind of submission to one another. In fact this kind of mutual submission to one another is characteristic of Christians, and it is a theme found frequently in the New Testament. Think of Philippians 2:3, for example: “In humility consider others better than yourselves.” Or Jesus’ teaching that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26-28), or the passage on servant leadership we’ve considered from Luke 22. The heart of every Christian ought to be marked by a humility that voluntarily submits itself to others for the sake of Christ.

Some Christian will argue that mutual submission *alone* is what is in view in this passage—that Paul is not telling wives that they should submit to their husbands in some unique way. But that argument fails if we look at the passage as a whole. Verse 21 stands as a sort of overarching introduction to the whole section that runs all the way through 6:9. Besides the instructions to wives, that section also commands children and slaves (or servants or employees) to submit to their parents and masters respectively. If Paul did not intend to be placing an obligation for a distinct kind of submission on wives, then we have to conclude that he also did not intend to do so for slaves—or more problematically, for children under their parents! We know from the totality of scripture that this argument can’t be right.

So verse 21 really provides the context in which these particular instructions to wives are given. As Christians, husbands and wives are to deal with one another in humility, voluntarily submitting to one another for Christ’s sake. But within that framework, Paul also gives wives a particular responsibility to submit, in a unique way, to their husbands.

***2. Paul calls wives to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord.***

In verses 22-24, Paul turns from the general, overarching command for Christian humility to the specific roles God has ordained for husband and wife. There are several things to notice here about this submission a wife is called to show toward her husband:

First, a woman’s submission to her husband does not imply in *any* way that she is inferior to him. This is a matter of role, not nature. This is really an appeal for the wife to submit herself to the authority *God* has ordained. Notice that Paul’s admonition is for *voluntary* submission in love. (See also Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Peter 5:5, where some Christians—both men *and* women—are told to submit to other Christians in other contexts. There is no difference of inherent worth or dignity here, just of role.)

Second, a woman is told to submit to her *own* husband. Paul does not here tell a woman to submit to every man, but to her own husband.

Third, wives should submit to their husbands “as to the Lord.” Now does that mean that they are to regard and treat their husbands as omnipotent kings of the universe? Of course not! It means the same thing that it does a few verses later, in 6:5-7. READ. The key phrase: “just as you would obey Christ” (v. 6). Part of a woman’s obedience to Christ is to follow his instruction to submit to the earthly authorities he has ordained, and in the family that authority is the husband. She submits to and obeys him because she loves Jesus Christ.

Fourth, that same phrase “as to the Lord” implies that the wife’s first allegiance is to Jesus Christ, and therefore Paul does not in any way expect her to submit to her husband in anything that violates Scripture’s commands. A husband’s headship and authority is not his own. It is given to him by God, and it is legitimate only when he exercises it in line with God’s commandments as revealed in Scripture. If a husband pushes his wife to disobey Scripture, she should respectfully refuse and remind her husband that she must obey God, not men.

**3. *Wives are to submit, Paul says, because the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.***

In verse 23, Paul says that the husband is the head of the wife. The word “head,” (Gr. *kephale*), in both the Greek and the English, implies authority. That’s obvious here because the text also says that Christ is the “head” of the church, and in verse 24, the church submits to Christ. We’ll have more to say about the husband’s responsibilities as “head” of his wife, but for now, the point is that Paul is beginning to draw the analogy between Christ/church and husband/wife. Just as Christ is head of the church and the church submits to him, so God has made the husband head of the wife and she should submit to him.

Elsewhere (1 Corinthians 11), Paul says that the man’s headship is rooted in creation itself. Male headship is a divine appointment, not a cultural phenomenon. This is the way God has ordered his universe, and Paul is here calling Christians to recognize that fact.

***4. Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church.***

Turning to husbands, the text gives us a number of subtle (and not so subtle) lessons about how this is supposed to work. Paul does not command husbands to “be in authority over your wife,” but to *love* them “just as” (*kathos*) Christ loved the church. Paul shows us here how he intends husbands to exercise their headship or leadership in the home—that leadership should be the same as Christ’s self-giving, sacrificial love which led him to the cross for his church.

Husbands, think about what that means: Christ *died* for the church, and that’s exactly the kind of self-sacrificial, even self-abasing love you are called to give to your wife.

That may mean all kinds of things. It may, for some, mean that you literally lay down your life and die for your wife. But for *all* husbands, it will mean swallowing pride, it will mean *actively* building up your wife spiritually, even when the day’s been hard and you’re both exhausted, and it will mean *frequently* subordinating your preferences and desires to your wife’s. You want to go out to a certain restaurant and she wants another one? She likes to go to bed early and you’d rather stay up late? There will be some give and take on issues like that as both of you seek to care for the other, but it is sin to play the headship card on stuff like that. That’s not even what headship means. Remember that your role, fundamentally, is to give yourself up for your wife’s good. Look for ways to love her, to honor her, to build her up and care for her.

Look at what Paul does here: When Paul addresses the husband, he doesn’t say one word about headship or submission. It’s almost as if he’d like to put his hands over the husband’s ears when he talks to the wife about submission (that’s her job), and then he turns to the husband and says, “Now you . . . *love*.” Men, when you think about your role as husband, I hope the idea that pops into your head isn’t “headship” or “my wife ought to submit to me,” but rather “love like Christ.” That’s the charge Paul places on you.

***5. Husbands are to give of themselves for their wives’ benefit.***

Christ’s giving himself up was for the benefit of his church—he gave himself up “for her.” Specifically, he gave himself up, as verses 26-27 put it, “to make her holy . . . and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.” Just as the goal of Christ’s self-giving love was the good of his church, so the goal of the husband’s self-giving love should be the good of his wife.

When a husband loves his wife as he should, their marriage will be marked by an atmosphere of healthy growth and maturing. The wife will feel secure in her husband’s love, and she will thrive both spiritually and emotionally.

***6. Husbands are to love their wives as they love themselves.***

In verses 28-31, Paul makes an important theological point based on the creation of man and woman. Look in verse 31. There Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, words which God proclaimed just after he had created Adam and Eve. (Remember the horizontal goal of marriage.) This idea of becoming “one flesh” describes union or oneness in marriage. When a man and a woman marry, they are no longer merely two autonomous individuals, but a living unity. They grow in their union with each other and become one flesh. This idea of “one flesh” has been at the bottom of Paul’s thought from the very beginning.

All of you know what self-care is. It is normal for most of you to take a shower regularly and to feed yourself. Paul draws out another comparison here—husbands ought to love their wives just as they love themselves. Nobody has to force you to take care of yourself. It is not normal to hate your own body by denying it food or never cleaning yourself. It is normal to feed your body and take care of it.

What’s the connection between the ideas of “one flesh” and self-care? Husbands, just as you would care for yourself, you should also care for your wife because the two of you are no longer two, but one. Your wife is now united to you. So, when you deny care for her, you are denying care for yourself. That’s why Paul can say in 28 that when a man loves his wife, he loves himself. When he cares for his wife and works for her good, he is also doing himself good. Conversely, a man should no more treat his wife insensitively than he would starve himself.

***7. Both husband and wife should remember that their marriage speaks to the world about Christ’s relationship with his church.***

In verses 32, Paul refers to the relationship between human marriage and the divine marriage being a “profound mystery.” The word “mystery” in the Bible often refers to the once hidden plan of God which has now been revealed in Jesus Christ. Unbeknownst to the people of Moses’ day God designed the institution of marriage to reflect and proclaim Christ’s love for his church. It’s important to realize that Paul is not saying here that he just saw a nice analogy and decided it to use it as an illustration to make his point. No, God *planned* from the very beginning for marriage to function in this way.

What this means is that these instructions for husbands and wives—and their respective roles within marriage—are not just culturally conditioned or accidental. The husband’s loving headship and the wife’s godly submission are part of the essence of marriage. God did it this way in order to teach the world about his own character and His Son’s love for His people. That’s a helpful thing to keep in mind if you naturally buck against the role God has given you as a man or a woman. You may not particularly like the idea that God has called you to lay down your life for your wife or to submit to your husband. But remember, this is not about us. It’s about God’s plan, God’s design, and God’s glory.

As individuals, you get to demonstrate the gopsel with your life. But in marriage, you get an additional privilege—your relationship as husband and wife displays to all those around you whether the gospel is true or not. How you treat one another in marriage, how you speak to one another, how you love one another says something to the world about whether the gospel is true or not. How you live with one another in marriage displays to the world the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.

***8. Paul calls wives to respect their husbands.***

Interestingly, in verse 33, Paul rounds out the section addressing husbands by commanding wives to respect their husbands. The term “respect” is actually the Greek word for “fear.” It is not fear, as in terror, but more like showing “reverence” and “honor” towards someone. That’s why the NIV translates the word as respect.

Why does Paul end this section with a reference to the wife’s need to respect her husband? Think for a moment about the complementary nature of the wife’s respect and the husband’s leadership. A husband’s leadership can either flourish or wilt away based on the wife’s respect for him. Her respect is necessary for her husband’s leadership to thrive. There is nothing that has the power to destroy a man or undermine his ministry more than the lack of a respect from his wife. There is truth to the old country song, “stand by your man.”

In all this, remember that God’s command for wives to respect their husbands has nothing to do with husbands doing all things incredibly well so that they deserve respect. Husbands and wives may execute their roles well and may make it easier for their spouses to respond, but God requires us to care for our spouses as He has commanded, whether we feel they deserve it or not. This is the true test of submission. If every time you feel frustrated with your husband you start disrespecting him, your going to slowly destroy your marriage. I think anyone who gives that idea some thought will notice a striking resemblance between the way God calls us to care for our spouses and the way He cared for us in Christ—when we certainly did not deserve it. **Romans 5:8**: *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Ultimately this means that wives submit and respect for the glory of Christ!

**APPLICATION**

***Single men*** – (1) Don’t wait to practice this type of self-sacrifice until you are married. Use your relationships now as a platform to practice this type of self-sacrificial living in preparation for marriage. (2) Look for a woman who willingly follows godly authority. One marker to look for in a future wife is someone who models a desire to follow godly authority. Look at the life of the women around you and ask: Do they desire to honor their Christian parents? Do they willingly follow the elders in this church? For those of you who are already dating, is the young lady you are with responsive to your leadership or is she always bucking against your guidance?

***Single woman***—(1) Find a self-sacrifical husband. What my desire is for you is that you find a man who makes this type of self-sacrificial leadership his primary goal in loving you. You don’t have to wait until marriage to see if the guy is self-sacrifical in his living. Look at his life now. This is one of the markers you want to look for when you are looking for a husband. Does his give up his life for others? Or does his world revolve around his own self-centered desires? (2) Submission often will involve a re-orienting of your goals in life. Most of you have been taught from a very early age to two things---be independent and make for yourself a good career. And now the pastor is telling you the opposite; when you get married, you tie ourself to a husband and become dependent on his leadership. I only do this because this is what is in the text. For some of you, this is going to be a very difficult re-orienting of your lives because your parents, your educators, and our culture has taught you to be fiercely self-dependent. Go to older, married godly women in the congregation and confess your struggles with this, be honest about your fears, and learn from them how them made this adjustment.

***Wives***—(1) Look to the Lord (and others) for strenght and hope. Biblical submission requires a lot from you. It is incredibly sanctifying to live under the leadership of an man. He’s not perfect. He’s going to mess up. Don’t go at this alone. Look to the Lord for strength; talk with other CHBC wives for encouragement. (2) Make it joy, not a burden, for your husband to lead you. If you are stubborn as a mule, start working on that stubbornness. Don’t let it persist. Make it your mission to serve your husband. Deliberately encourage him when he shows leadership in areas that really matter/in areas that are most important to the Lord. Don’t make a huge deal if he forgets to take out the garbage if at the same time, he works hard to help with the children, he provides well by laboring all day at work for the family, and works at leading in family devotonals.

***Husbands***— (1) Inescapable leadership. Note that Paul does not say the husband *ought to* be the head of the wife. He says he *is* the head of the wife. This is an indicative, not an imperative. Do you know the difference between an indicative and imperative?

* An indicative is a statement of fact. For example, the chair is brown; the ship is tilted; Mark’s sermons are long. There is no [command/directive] in the sentence, just fact.
* An imperative is a command. It directs us to do something. For example, turn on the light! Close the door! Pick up your laundry off the floor!

Nowhere is the husband commanded to be a head to his wife. This is because he already is the head of his wife, by the very nature of marriage. *The husband is in a position of inescapable leadership.* He cannot successfully refuse to lead. He may lead poorly, but he will lead. This is God’s design for all marriages. A husband’s ineffectiveness does not eliminate the fact that he is still called to lead his wife. If he does not love her well, he is a poor head, but a head nonetheless. (2) In being the head of the home, the husband is ultimately responsible for all problems.Men, whether through good leadership, tyranny, or abdication, you are ultimately responsible for the state of the home, including the problems. We know this idea intuitively from our understanding of leadership….*Example*: captain of a ship or a CEO—when something goes wrong with his workers or his organization, even though he did not personally do the thing that went wrong, as a head or leader of the group, he is still responsible. The same thing applies to marriage, when something goes wrong in marriage, you are ultimately responsible before God. Mind you, there is a difference between responsibility and guilt. If a woman has cheated on her husband or she foolishly spends all of their money in shopping sprees, she is guilty . . . but he is responsible.

[QUESTIONS?]