

Walking Worthy in Marriage – Part I – *Ephesians 5:22-33*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Psychological studies affirm it, and the Bible has been saying it for ages. Cracking the communication code between husband and wife involves understanding one thing: that unconditional respect is as powerful for him as unconditional love is for her. It's the secret to marriage that every couple seeks, and yet few couples ever find.”

That's a description you may be familiar with for a well-known book called “Love and Respect.” In fact I think there's even been a marriage class at our church using this book. Well, this popular book was developed based on principles we're going to study today as we work on finishing up Ephesians chapter 5.

So as we begin, I'd like to ask: How are you all doing in your marriages today? Have you got it down pat, or could you use a little guidance on how to make it operate more smoothly? Would you describe your marriage as peaceful and harmonious, or would it be better described as a war zone? Depends on the day, you may say. How are you doing at nourishing and cherishing each other and helping each other grow closer to the Lord? Are you confronting problems in your marriage or allowing them to fester? Well my guess is that everyone in this room, whether we're married or not, has something to learn still about marriage and how God has designed it to operate most effectively. None of us ever reach the point where we have nothing left to learn about marriage.

Today we're going to be primarily looking at the instruction Paul gives wives about marriage, and then next week, Lord willing, we'll move on to husbands and how God has called them to operate within the marriage relationship.

Let's begin by reading today's passage in verses 22 to 33 of Ephesians chapter 5:

22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 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. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

II. ALL OF YOU, BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER

Now you may remember from our message last week about maximizing time that the final wise use of time given to us by Paul was to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Well this week Paul picks up right where we left off and applies this idea of being subject to other people to how wives are to operate within the marriage relationship. But one thing we should be sure to notice and remember from last week is that all of us, men and women, are called to walk in humility toward each other, even husbands to wives. Remember the instruction from last week about being subject to one another in the fear of Christ applies to all believers. Each of us is to walk in humility toward other people and be willing to set aside our own personal opinions, agenda and writes out of fear of Christ, concern for his glory and purposes, and love for God and other people. This is in fact the key ingredient to being able to walk the way God has called us to walk and to accomplish God's purposes by his power.

So men, as we consider the instructions to wives this week, don't start thinking you have all power and can treat your wives disrespectfully and that they just

need to do whatever you say, no questions asked. If you come to that conclusion in what we study today and next week, I will have failed miserably in communicating the truths of God's Word. God always calls us to humility toward him and toward other people and to a spirit of working together for his purposes rather than our own, and marriage is no exception. In fact the way husbands and wives operate in their own marriages should be a beautiful picture of the way we are treated by and relate to Jesus Christ.

So as we look at verse 22 of Ephesians we see that it's really a continuation of the thought begun in verse 21. A more literal translation could read: "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ; wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord." After telling each of us to be subject to each other, Paul then applies it specifically to wives and how they relate to their own husbands.

Now this concept of "being subject to" another person means to subordinate or place under. The Blue Letter Bible says that the "word was a Greek military term meaning to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader. In non-military use, it was 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.'" To be subject to is to be willing to follow the leadership of another person for the good of the team.

Have you ever been involved in a team where more than one person is trying to lead and set the direction and call the shots? What that usually means is lots of wasted time and constant conflict. Have you ever had two bosses each trying to set your agenda and get you to make what they want done a priority? How well do you think an army would do without lines of authority and if various leaders were constantly resetting the direction and giving conflicting instructions? Lots of human lives would be lost and very likely the entire war.

In the same way, in the body of Christ and in marriage, the consequences can be extreme when we allow our pride or our selfish motives or our desire for power and recognition to lead us into forcing our will and placing what we want over the good of the team and the glory of God...when we think primarily of ourselves and what we want rather than other people and what God's will is. This is why God has given us clear lines of authority, in the body of Christ and in marriage, meant not to elevate one person above another or give one person more value than another, but to provide for effective teamwork and peaceful relationships and for

allowing each of us to function best with the unique skills and gifts he's given us. He's done this so that we can be efficient and effective by his power in accomplishing his will and walking as children of light.

I think each of us in this room can think of examples of marriages that were anything but pleasant because the roles and lines of authority that God has established were out of order. Have you ever heard the expression, "Happy wife...happy life?" I'm sure we've all heard it many times and most of our wives wish we would get after it and take it to heart! But while there is some truth in that saying, in practicality in our modern world it really has come to mean that keeping the wife happy and following her leadership in everything is the best way for a marriage to work. It has often come to mean that keeping the wife happy is the top priority for men in their lives and marriages...just give her what she wants and do everything you can to avoid conflict and you'll have a marriage that lasts. It has come to mean that wives are the head of the home and that husbands just need to do their bidding if they want peace in their house.

Well, let's consider what Paul has to say on this topic today and see if that approach to marriage lines up with God's design in Scripture. I want you to notice first of all that there are only 3 and ½ verses out of 12 that are directed at wives, while 8 and ½ verses are needed to outline the responsibilities of husbands. That should tell you something, men: you have a big responsibility within the marriage relationship and challenging task that can only be accomplished by God's power within you! So don't get too comfortable this week and think that wives have the hardest job.

Now the 3 and ½ verses directed to wives are verses 22 to 24 and then the last half of verse 33. In these verses we see 2 clear and simple commands given to wives. The first is that wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything, while the second is that wives are to respect their husbands.

III. WIVES, BE SUBJECT TO YOUR HUSBANDS IN EVERYTHING

So let's consider the first command wives are given: Be subject to your husbands in everything. And remember our definition of "being subject to": 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.'"...being willing to follow the leadership of another person for the good of the team. Sounds easy, doesn't it?

Well it might be easy if you have a perfect husband who always makes good choices, who's always thinking of you, and who has perfect and complete knowledge about all things. But how many of you wives out there would say you have imperfect husbands? If you haven't raised your hand yet, go ahead and do it because every husband in this room is imperfect and makes mistakes and doesn't always think of other people above themselves. And there could be some just plain terrible husbands even in this room. And that's why this command to wives given by Paul is very challenging to most wives... Especially that part about "in everything."

But before you wives write this command of Paul off as impossible to achieve or out of touch with reality, let's first consider what Paul is not saying here. Paul is not saying that wives cannot offer advice and opinions and diligently work to talk sense into their husbands. He's not saying that wives can't use Scripture to confront their husbands when they're in error or are about to make a huge mistake. Paul is not painting a picture here of wives who just nod their heads and accept whatever their husbands have to say, allowing them to make huge mistakes and bring terrible harm to their families. That's never how the Bible teaches us to interact with other people, even in a marriage relationship. We are always called to speak the truth in love and to use scriptural principles to sharpen each other and spur each other on to growth in Christ. Everywhere we go we're called to shine the light into the darkest places, exposing sin that's taken hold and calling people out. And wives are expected to do the same for their husbands.

However, what Paul is saying here is that wives are to allow their husbands to lead their families, and when all has been said and done wives are to follow the decisions made by their husbands and be willing cooperate and work together in the decisions that have been made. Wives are not called to give lip service to the decisions made, but then work in the background to accomplish something

entirely different or take steps to derail the plan...in other words to be passive aggressive.

Sadly there are times when husbands make mistakes in their decisions and sometimes wives, after doing their best to convince them otherwise, have to allow their husbands to make the mistakes. Sometimes that's the only way they're going to learn and maybe develop some humility in the process. And, guess what, if wives were the head of the house they would at times make mistakes too.

One thing to remember, however, is that there are times when wives have complete justification to not be subject to their husbands and to not follow their lead. Whenever a husband is asking his wife and/or family to do things that are against God's moral framework as revealed in Scripture or to participate in attitudes or actions that are sinful and against God's will as revealed in Scripture, it's time for the wife to commit civil disobedience. When faced with the choice of following her husband or God's Word, the wife must always choose God's Word.

I've known several women who have told me they don't attend church because either their husband isn't a believer, or he's been hurt by someone in the church and doesn't want to attend any longer. Let's be clear that that is not a biblical application of being subject to your husband. Just as each of us is taught in the Bible to be subject to the governing authorities, and yet to rebel if they ask us to do anything against God's Word, so wives also need to be primarily concerned about following God's Word and be courageous enough to not be subject to their husbands whenever they're being asked to do things against God's will.

So why do wives need to be subject to their husbands according to Paul? Well he gives us the reason in verses 23 and 24. He says:

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. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their own husbands in everything.

Wives are to be subject to their husbands because the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. The lines of authority developed by God for the effective operation of his church and kingdom are this: God the

Father is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the church, including men and women, and man is the head of a woman. Is God the Father more important than Christ or does he have more value? No. These lines of authority have nothing to do with who's more important or who has more value. They are simply the way God has set up his kingdom to operate most effectively and to be able to accomplish his purposes with the least amount of conflict and using the unique gifts he's given to each member of the team.

Our value as children of God always comes from Christ alone and not from whether we're male or female, or what job we've been given in marriage or the body of Christ. As Paul says in Galatians 3, verses 26 through 29:

...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

In Christ, should we choose to accept it, our endless struggle to find value and worth within ourselves and what we do is over forever. Whether we are male or female, we have eternal value and worth in Christ and have received eternal blessings and riches we're only just beginning to comprehend. As such, we are now freed to operate in humility in all of our relationships, and walk within the role and gifts God has appointed for us. Wives have no reason to think they are not valuable and important because they are called to operate under the leadership and headship of their husbands.

Think about the human body. How much could it accomplish if it were only a head? Absolutely nothing. If there was a way for it to survive without the rest of the body, the only thing it could do for itself is a lot of talking. And talking doesn't get anything done, does it? Have you ever known a great talker who never actually puts any of his big ideas into practice? I've known a few and after awhile I got really tired of all the talking that never went anywhere. The head needs the body and the body needs the head if anything is going to be accomplished.

So wives, please don't allow Satan to convince you that operating with your husband as the head in your marriage is not something you can or should accept.

Remember, God's ways are in stark contrast to the ways of the world and will even be laughed at by those who don't know Christ, yet they are infinitely more able to bring fulfillment and peace and success in your marriage.

Now in thinking about how to practically operate with your husband as the head in your marriage, use as your example the way the church and individual believers are to allow Christ to operate as their head. Spend some time this week thinking about this and how you can implement that attitude and perspective into your marriage. Think of the way God calls each of us to walk in humility and follow his leadership and learn how to put that into practice in your marriage. We'll talk about the practicalities of this a little more after we look at the next command given to wives in our passage today.

IV. WIVES, RESPECT YOUR HUSBANDS

So the second command given to wives is found in the second half of verse 33. Paul says:

...and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.

Wives are to see to it that they respect their husbands. So what is the meaning of the Greek word translated, "respect," here? Well, the Greek word here is *phobeo*, and it's related to the word for "fear" that we looked at last week when considering what it means to operate in fear of Christ. The meaning is "to fear or be afraid, or to reverence, venerate, or treat with deference or reverential obedience." In the context of wives respecting their husbands, it speaks of wives honoring the position of leadership their husbands have been given in their families, speaking to them and treating them with respect, and being willing to follow their leadership.

So is a wife's respect for her husband really that important in the marriage relationship? In discussing this concept of wives respecting their husbands, Dr. Emerson Eggerich, author of the "Love and Respect" book shared this information:

"When Decision Analysts, Inc., did a national survey on male-female relationships, one question for men read:

‘Even the best relationships sometimes have conflicts on day-to-day issues. In the middle of a conflict with my wife, I am more likely to be feeling:

- A. That my wife doesn't respect me right now.
- B. That my wife doesn't love me right now.’

Not surprisingly, 81.5 percent of men chose "A."

The survey only substantiated what I had already discovered in my years of working with married couples: Women need to feel loved, and men need to feel respected. This may explain why Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:33 that a husband must love his wife and a wife must respect her husband. Both commands are unconditional. The hard part is that respect comes more easily to men, and love comes easier to women.”

Now next week we’ll be looking at the responsibility of men to love their wives, but today we want to understand this concept of wives respecting their husbands and why it’s so important.

Let’s think of this idea of respect in terms of leadership principles. We know from what we've studied so far that husbands are called by God to lead. My question for you is can a person lead well without having the respect of those he or she is leading? How likely are people to follow a person they don't respect? Without having respect for someone a person is very unlikely to follow and if not respected a potential leader will not be able to lead successfully. This is why people usually resign from leadership positions when some uncomfortable truth is uncovered about them. Respect is eroded and leadership ability is compromised.

There's also just something inherent that God has built into men that hungers for respect. In thinking of my own marriage, some of the hardest times have been when we've gone through seasons where Mindy has grown frustrated with me about something and her respect for me has been temporarily eroded. And even when we’ve talked through it, admitted mistakes and are working to make changes, it takes time to rebuild that respect and trust and confidence. And in those times it’s very hard to lead effectively because the respect element has

been compromised. It also leaves me feeling unsettled and sometimes unloved because I can sense in the tone of her talking and her way of relating to me that she's struggling to respect and trust me.

It's also so interesting that we tend to be good at giving what we want to our wives, while they're good at giving what they want to us. In other words, I understand my own deep need and desire for respect and I strive to always give that to Mindy no matter what we're going through. In fact being respected by my wife makes me feel loved and at peace, so my tendency is to think that makes her feel loved as well. Mindy on the other hand, knowing her own need for love, understands how to show love in ways that communicate love to her...which I would say for her is primarily acts of service...doing nice things and working hard for other people. That's what communicates love to her and she is always working to communicate love to other people in that same way. However, my hunger for respect may not be something that really resonates with her and oftentimes may not even be on her radar.

Our challenge as husbands and wives is to learn to show love and respect in many different ways, but especially in ways that our spouses understand and long for. To go beyond just giving our spouses what we want and instead start giving them what they want and need to be effective and fulfilled in the marriage relationship. And for men, the underlying element needed to be effective in leading as God has designed us to lead is the respect of our wives. But don't forget we need love too and that wives also need to be respected by their husbands.

Well, wives, what if your husband is not a respectable person? What if he's self-centered, makes bad decisions, or is an alcoholic or addicted to other things not honoring to God? What if he lies or cheats or lives for work and building up his own personal kingdom? Should you still find a way to respect him? And how do you respect a person that's not respectable?

First, notice that Paul doesn't say that wives should see to it that they respect their husbands as long as they're behaving well or as long as they're worthy of respect. There are actually no qualifications or exceptions given here, are there?

Well, fortunately we're given some specific, practical guidance in Scripture on this issue in 1 Peter 3:1-6. In this passage, Peter says:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3 Your adornment must not be merely external — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

Notice Peter's talking about being subject even to husbands that may be disobedient to the Word. Clearly, according to Scripture, wives are to continue being subject to and showing respect to their husbands, even if they're not respectable men who are living their lives by God's Word. As we already discussed, this doesn't mean that they are to obey their husbands if asked to do things contrary to God's Word. It also doesn't mean that they aren't to do all they can to share God's truth with them and advise them to make better decisions. However, it does mean that wives are to continue following the leadership of their husbands and finding ways to respect them without condoning their behavior and poor choices or participating in things contrary to God's Word.

The call of wives with unrespectable husbands is to continue showing by their attitude and actions their love for God, their faithfulness to him and their willingness to respect their husbands and follow their leadership. As they walk with a gentle and quiet spirit, continuing to delight themselves in God, be faithful to him, love and respect their husbands, they will be planting seeds and maybe even drawing their husbands to the point where they are ready to come into right relationship with Christ and become men worthy of respect.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

And this really is the call of each of us in whatever challenging, painful and difficult circumstances we face in Christ. We continue to delight ourselves in the Lord, love other people, be faithful to God's truth in our attitudes and actions, and in the process we overcome evil with good. As Paul tells us in Romans 12, verse 21: ***Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.***

So how are you doing in your own marriages, wives? Are you being subject to your husbands and are you showing them respect in your words and actions? Take some time this week to observe yourself and how you relate to your husband. Listen to the way you talk to him. Sometimes that's the best way to tell if you're respecting your husband...listening to what you say about him or to him and the tone of your voice as you do it. Are you constantly belittling him or making fun of him or complaining about him or talking to him with contempt in your voice? Are you quietly working against him in the background? Or are you talking to him and treating him in ways that show your respect and express your commitment to follow his leadership in your family?

And men, are you loving your wives and treating them with respect in your words and actions? Do you have their best interests at heart? Or are you lording it over them, not listening to their advice or guidance, and not concerning yourself with what's best for them and will contribute to their growth in the Lord? Next week we'll have a chance to see what guidance God gives to each of us as husbands on how we're called to operate in our marriages.

Lord, as we close today, teach us how to be better husbands and wives...how to treat our spouses with the love, respect and goodwill that you show to each of us...how to be more concerned about delighting ourselves in you and living your Word, than about feeling sorry for ourselves, standing up for our rights, or wanting to accomplish our own selfish will. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves in our marriage or other situations in life, teach us to overcome evil with good by your power and the principles in your holy Word. Teach us to be willing to follow what you teach us in your Word over what we've learned from the world. Teach us to believe it and act on it and watch as you accomplish things we never thought possible in our marriages and in us as your body!