

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

Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well men, are you ready for your big day today? Last week we focused in our study on how women are called to operate within the marriage relationship, but today we get to tackle husbands and the high calling God has given each of us within our marriages. If you'll remember, we're studying Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22 to 33. And as we noted last week, within this passage 3 and 1/2 verses are devoted to wives, while 8 and 1/2 verses are focused on husbands, so we've got some ground to cover this week and next. My prayer for today and next week is that God will give each husband here a fresh and new perspective on his marriage and what it really means to operate as the head in a Christ-like way. My prayer is also that wives will understand the challenging job that has been given to their husbands and that they will do all they can to allow their husbands to fulfill the high calling that God has given to them in marriage.

But before we dive into Scripture today, I want to briefly paint for you a picture of a "Christian" marriage that many have accepted as normal and that has played out in many a Christian household over the years. In fact, the picture I'm going to paint for you could easily describe the home many of us were raised in. Here's what it looks like: the marriage begins with a fundamental understanding that, according to Scripture, the husband is the head of the wife. Armed with this understanding, the husband approaches his marriage viewing himself as the boss and expecting his wife to fully accept his leadership and defer to him in all major decisions.

Unfortunately the husband isn't necessarily that mature in his faith and in fact he tends to be quite self-centered and very focused on getting what he wants out of life and about maintaining his own personal freedoms.

Now this husband views himself as the primary breadwinner. He works hard at his job, and when he comes home he expects his wife to have dinner on the table and to clean up the mess when it's done. In fact, he views his primary duties in the evenings as recovering from his long day of work and having his wife and kids

wait on him. After all he's been working so hard all day to make a living, now it's their turn to repay him for all his hard work and give him a chance to relax a little bit.

Our husband also has a lot of hobbies and toys and things he likes to do in his free time, and when he's not working, he gives himself complete freedom to pursue all these things. Sometimes he allows his kids to participate with him and occasionally his wife, but quite often he escapes by himself to have fun with his friends and refuel his tank after a long week at work.

As time goes by his relationship with his wife becomes somewhat strained, as you might imagine, because she's expected to take care of everything at home while he basically does whatever he wants, usually without her. And when the kids reach the age where they're all in school, she even gets a job, yet still she's expected to do everything she was doing before with little or no help from the husband.

Our husband is also not investing much time at all in getting to know his wife and thinking about what's best for her and working on developing their relationship together. And then, of course, there's his kids. A couple of them really enjoy the things he enjoys and like to participate whenever they can in the activities he likes.

But unfortunately there are one or two kids that really have no interest in doing the things he likes to do, and the feeling is mutual. He has absolutely no interest or appreciation for the things they like to do. So, as you can imagine, he struggles to develop a healthy relationship with them and really get to know them. They in turn feel like he doesn't really care about them and wonder why he never spends any time with them.

But life is busy, the years fly by, and this becomes business as usual. His wife begins to live with resentment and they spend a lot of time fighting. She struggles to follow his leadership because she knows his decisions are very self-focused and usually revolve around him getting what he wants. She also doesn't feel that he really loves or cares about her as a person. A couple of kids end up wanting nothing to do with their dad and can't wait to graduate and get out of the house. And through all the years this husband never learns how to operate within marriage and as a dad in the way God has called him to operate. He never moves

beyond a surface understanding of what it means to operate as the head in his marriage.

Well today we're going to break through that surface way of thinking about what it means for a husband to operate as the head of his wife in marriage and we're going to dig down deep to what Scripture really says about what's involved in being the head. And what we're going to find is that what God is calling husbands to in marriage couldn't be further away from the picture I just painted for you. A generation ago I would say this was a very common way for husbands and wives to operate within a so-called "Christian" marriage. However, in the current generation, I would say we've begun moving away from that scenario to a situation where, in many cases, wives are now operating as the head of their husbands. And what we will see today is that neither of these approaches to marriage are biblical.

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.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

II. THE HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE

Well, clearly stated at the beginning of this passage we do see that the husband is the head of the wife. This is, in fact, Paul's first main point to both husbands and wives. But the question we need to tackle today, is whether the typical understanding of what it means for the husband to be the head of the wife is really what God has in mind? Is being the head of the wife primarily just about power and authority and control?

Well, as we seek to answer this question, let's first think about what it really means to be the head in terms of the human body. You may remember that we talked last week about how the head is useless without the rest of the body... It can do nothing but talk and nothing will get done without the cooperation of the rest of the body. In the human body, the head's job is to guide the movements and actions of the entire body. The head decides what needs to be done and sends messages to the various parts of the body to carry it out. So certainly there is an authority and leadership component in husbands serving as the head their wives.

Now the head of the human body is also responsible for making sure that it takes care of the body and doesn't ask the parts of the body to do things that are harmful to them. A properly working head protects each part of the body. The head doesn't tell the hand to put itself under a chopping ax or to touch a hot stove. The head should also always have the best interests of the body in mind. So another important aspect of being the head involves protection and watchcare.

Continuing on with our analysis of the human body, we realize that in order for the head to do its job, the body needs to follow its lead and direction. What happens if the parts of the body are not following the lead of the head? What if while I was talking to you my hand decided to branch out on its own and punch you in the face? Or what if I was enjoying the view from the top of a mountain and my feet decided to do their own thing and walk me off a cliff? Clearly the head and the body need to work together or we have major problems that can even be life threatening. This means that submission and cooperation are also a part of the picture of husbands being the head.

Well as we try to develop a deep and full understanding of what Paul means here in calling the husband to operate as the head of the wife, the best place to look is really not in the human body, but in other passages of Scripture that refer to this same concept. I want to look briefly at one particular passage today that's right here in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 15 and 16, a passage we just studied recently. It says:

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

What we see here and also in a similar passage from Colossians chapter 2, verse 19, is that the job of the head, in this case Jesus Christ, is to cause everything in the body to work together and stick together in order to cause the growth of the body and the building up of itself in love. The head is focused on promoting cooperation and action and growth in the body. The head is looking beyond itself and is most concerned about the whole body, keeping it healthy and growing and walking in love.

So what we can conclude is that being the head is in no way justification to be self-centered and power hungry and focused on getting what you want. Instead, being the head is a huge responsibility that involves looking beyond yourself to what's best for others and for the body as a whole. Being the head and what it involves is most perfectly illustrated for us in Jesus Christ himself, the perfect and ultimate head, ***“who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

Jesus as the head didn't use his powerful position to lord it over people, but instead humbled himself and gave himself up for the good of others. And husbands, to be the head of the wife is a call to do the same thing Jesus did and continues to do: to give yourself up for the good of your wife and for the good of your family...to devote yourself not to getting what you want, but to God's

purposes and to accomplishing and working for what's best for your marriage, your wife and your family as a whole.

Notice also in verse 23 of Ephesians chapter 5 that “...***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.*** This verse connects being the head to being a savior. It indicates that as the Savior of the body, it makes sense that Christ is the head of the body. And what does a savior do? A savior rescues and protects. A savior is always concerned about what's best for the body and our Savior and perfect example was even willing to even lay down his own life to save the body.

A friend of mine that works as a missionary in China recently asked me to help him develop short, simple ways of explaining several abstract Christian concepts to Chinese people learning English. One of the concepts he wanted me to work on was the word, “savior.” This is what I came up with: “a savior is someone who steps in to keep something bad from happening to you.” Sounds simplistic doesn't it, but it captures the essential idea that a savior is watching out for others and stepping in to protect and rescue them, even to the point of giving up their own life in the process.

And men, this is the perspective we need in our marriages if we are to function in a Christ-like way as the head of our wives. We need to move beyond the worldly view that being the head just gives us power and authority to get what we want, to recognizing that in God's world, headship is not about us, but about working for the good of others, rescuing, protecting and promoting growth in God and his Word...it's about being a servant-leader.

As Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 20, verses 25 to 28:

25b "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The call of husbands to be the head of their wives is not a call to exalt ourselves and get what we want, but rather to humble ourselves and give ourselves up for their good and to accomplish God's purposes rather than our own.

III. HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES BY GIVING YOURSELVES UP FOR THEM

So this brings us to Paul's second major point in his instructions to husbands. The first point was that the husband is the head of the wife, but in a much different sense than we tend to think of it. Paul's second point is outlined in verses 25 to 27 of Ephesians chapter 5:

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.

Paul's second point is that the call of husbands in marriage is to love their wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. And there it is again: that concept of loving others by giving ourselves up for them. If you'll remember, in the beginning of Ephesians chapter 5, as Paul shared with us our call to be imitators of God and walk in love, he told us to follow the example of the way Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. He told us that to imitate God and love the way he loves, we give ourselves up for other people. And this is also what we do as husbands in our marriages.

Husbands, our call is to love our wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Sounds a bit challenging, doesn't it? And it doesn't sound at all like what we've often heard about men being the head of their wives. What a different concept this is from the typical interpretation of what it means for a man to be the head of his wife.

You see, it's so easy for us as men to fall into this idea that being the head of our wives is primarily about control and power and authority, while ignoring this clear teaching that it's really about us giving ourselves up and taking the responsibility for rescuing and protecting and contributing to the growth of our wives, our kids and our family as a whole.

Paul is telling us today, here in Ephesians, that being the head is not in any way about exalting ourselves and having a blank check to do whatever we want. Instead, it's a call to take our eyes off ourselves and what we may selfishly want, and to look out for the good of others, taking responsibility for being godly men who truly know how to love our wives, help them grow in their walk with the Lord, and become the women God has designed and called them to be.

Think of this for a moment in terms of someone being the CEO of a company. If the CEO is only concerned about how much money he's making, or about getting people to obey him, or about getting recognition he thinks he deserves, he's either going to get himself fired or his company is headed for failure. A good CEO takes his job and responsibility seriously and moves beyond what he wants personally to focus on the needs of the company as a whole. He gives up a lot of energy and time in developing a vision for the future, looking for and correcting weaknesses, investing in his employees and watching out for the best interests of the company. He in a sense gives himself up for the good of the company. And if he does this well the company will be successful and he will be rewarded accordingly. But the reward and the personal benefits can't be his primary focus. The key to the success of the company is that the CEO takes his eyes off himself and what he may selfishly want and instead works for the good of the business as a whole.

And this is the same idea that we as husbands need to grasp as we learn to function as the head of our households. The leadership and headship that God is calling us to is not self-focused, but involves giving ourselves up for the good of our wives and families. And notice in verse 25 that husbands are called to love just like Jesus Christ. Not kind of like him, but just like him. Wow! Clearly that can only happen as we grow our own relationship with Christ and learn to walk in his power.

And men, let me challenge you today to make the pursuit of Christ the focus of your life. That is the only way you will ever be able to be the head of your wife in a biblical sense and truly function effectively in your marriage. What we as husbands need to understand is that in learning how to love our wives, we need to get to know Christ and understand the way he loves us and functions as our head. We need to get on our knees, immerse ourselves in his Word and allow him to transform us from the inside out.

In Jesus Christ we have a perfect example to follow and he gives us the power of his Holy Spirit so that it's actually possible to follow that example. So what do we learn in our passage today from the example of Jesus and how he loves the church? What can we as husbands learn from his example and put into practice in our marriages? Let's look at verses 26 and 27, where we're given the reason Jesus gives himself up for the church and then the process he uses to bring about her growth and transform her into a beautiful bride.

First of all, why does Jesus give himself up for the church according to verse 26? He does it so that he can sanctify her and make her holy and blameless and a beautiful bride for himself. Jesus loves the church and gives himself up for her so that he can walk her out of the ways of darkness and death and into the perfect ways of light and life, in the process turning her into something beautiful and inviting her into an eternal love relationship with him. He gives himself up for her good and to lead her deeper into love relationship with him.

Applying this to husbands, we can conclude that loving our wives and giving ourselves up for them involves working for their good, helping them grow in their walk with the Lord, confronting any areas of darkness in ourselves or in them, and working constantly to build our relationship and love for each other. As husbands we're to be concerned about our wives' spiritual health and the health of our relationship with each other. Husbands, we have a call to watch out for our wives and our household and to always be looking for ways to promote growth in the Lord and closer fellowship with him and each other. But how do we do this? This sounds like such a big job.

Well, back in verse 26, how does Jesus do it? How does he sanctify the church? What is the process he uses? Well, according to the verse, the sanctification of the church is carried out by the washing of water with the word. Jesus uses the power and truth of the Word of God to bring about transformation in our lives and make us more like him. And the same is true as husbands love their wives and give themselves up for them. In order for us, our wives, and our kids grow in our walk with the Lord, get rid of darkness in our lives, and build our relationship and love for each other, we need to live and breathe the Word of God and incorporate it into every aspect of our daily existence. We need to be talking about it as a family, studying it together, and applying it to daily situations and challenges. The

most important tool we need in our toolkit as husbands is the Word of God. Without it we're just a talking head that accomplishes nothing!

IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Husbands, please don't let what we've learned today mean that you are expected to do a job that really only God can do. Let me be absolutely clear: You are not capable in yourselves of bringing about transformation and freedom and healthy relationships in your marriage and family. Our Triune God is the only One who can bring about heart change within human beings. So please don't leave today with that heavy burden resting on your shoulders, thinking that somehow you've got to pull this off on your own. Just let that burden slide off right now.

God is truly the only One who can change hearts and make people more like himself. However, you can be the husband God has called you to be as you walk in close fellowship with Christ, feeding on his Word, and allowing him to be your Head, your Life-Giver, your Joy, your Friend, and your one true source of strength and power. You can be used by him to the head of your marriage in the biblical sense, giving yourself up to rescue and protect and use the Word of God to bring life transformation to your marriage and family. But to do this effectively, you need to get after Jesus Christ, men, and allow him to transform you into the husbands God has called you to be.

God has really placed it on my heart this week that we as men and husbands need to rise up and fulfill the calling God has given us in the church and in our marriages. But we can only do this when we get serious about pursuing God. I would ask you today, "Are you there?" Are you pursuing him? Are you beginning to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind? Or are you mostly focused on other priorities, while God usually takes a backseat?

Husbands and wives, as we close today, let's commit to pray for each other, our marriages and our families, our church body, those who don't know Christ, our country, diligently. Being the husbands and wives God has called us to be and walking as children of light is simply not possible until we learn to depend on our God in everything.

I had a chance to watch the movie, “War Room,” this past week. What a powerful movie and a message each of us, husbands and wives, need to hear! If you haven’t seen it yet, make sure you do it soon. The war room in the movie is the prayer closet...a private place where you can get alone with God, fellowshiping with him and asking him to fight your battles for you...a place where you can do battle with the devil by the power of God through prayer.

If you haven’t seen the movie yet, I won’t spoil it for you, but the story involves an old woman who’s a true prayer warrior, coming alongside a young woman with a troubled marriage and showing her how to stop complaining and trying to fix her husband and instead spending her time getting to know and love God, praying for her husband and her family, and allowing God to do “the heavy lifting,” as she put it. And when this young woman finally gets serious about it, God starts doing some incredible miracles in her marriage, family and in other people they know.

Mindy got inspired by the movie and transformed a part of our closet into a war room this past week. She repainted, hung several powerful verses about prayer, created a chalkboard on the door for prayer requests, and hung a string with clothespins for writing requests, Scriptures and answers to prayer. We’re both looking forward to spending a lot of time in there, fellowshiping with God, handing our challenges over him, and watching him fight the battles and move the mountains.

My friends, let’s leave today, not burdened with thinking we’re on our own in trying to operate within marriage the way God has designed. But let’s leave instead with confidence in God’s power and his unchanging commitment to bringing transformation to every part of our lives...to walking us into the life that is truly life! Let’s leave with a passion to pursue him and know him more and a willingness to rearrange our lives, if necessary, to make that possible. Let’s get into the war room and watch as God accomplishes things we never thought possible!

Next week, Lord willing, we’ll finish the final instructions Paul gives to husbands, talk about something we need to guard against, and spend some time dwelling on a few amazing truths about Christ and how he loves us.