

Is there a connection between marriage and the Church?

Today's section of Scripture in Ephesians explores that question.

Ephesians 5:21-33...*and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.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.*

As we begin to look at today's section of scripture, two things stood out to me.

First, this instruction is given on the tail end of Paul talking about how we are to walk as Jesus Followers, indicating that the principles he's talking about are woven into a lifestyle of walking in the Way of Jesus.

It comes as no surprise to me that those who have not embraced the Way of Jesus and His "counter cultural" ways would struggle with the high bar of Love and Respect that is explained here.

The second thing that jumped out at me was that Paul actually says that the actual principle he is emphasizing here is that of Christ and the Church. He's using the most intimate of earthly relationships to help us understand the most intimate of all relationships. We see this explained in verse 32: *This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*

In our day and age many people don't understand the true nature of the Kingdom and the Church. They can easily see "Church" as an activity driven, event-based organization rather than a life giving, relational organism. The difference between "going to church" versus "being the church".

Let's look at these verses in context of walking in the Way of Jesus as a part of His Body, the Church.

There are 3 major things that Paul talks about in this section of Scripture that are shown through the marriage relationship, yet on a deeper level show us how we are to live in Christ.

- 1) Be subject
- 2) Self-sacrificing love
- 3) Leaving and "cleaving" (joining)

1) Be subject

To understand the real context of this principle, we need to see how the Father had Paul lead into this in **verses 18-21**: *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

We see that being subject to one another is described in context of being Spirit-filled and walking in unity, worship, praise, and thankfulness. The subjection or submission is first introduced as a mutual responsibility before it is further described within the context of a marriage relationship.

This should help us combat the unbalanced and ungodly view of subjection or submission that some try to overlay in the marriage relationship – basically viewing wives as of lesser value, subservient in the negative sense, and in many cultures, unfortunately still today, as nothing more than the “property” of the husband.

Because of the abuse of this principle and the fear of “losing” oneself, etc. it’s easy to bristle against and even ignore this principle.

We see the principle of being subject woven throughout the tapestry of the Gospel. The Greek word is *hypotasso*. This 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".

Any *hypotasso* the Father calls us to, is ultimately under the command of one Leader (even when used in context of submitting to authorities, husbands, etc.) – as Paul says here in **verse 22**, *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*

A wife’s *hypotasso* to her husband is a picture of all of our *hypotasso* to Jesus: *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (Verse 24)*

In case anyone wanted to lean toward an unbiblical or unbalanced application of wives being subject to their husbands, the Father immediately gives us this next principle.

2) Self-sacrificing love

Verse 25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*

I’ve heard many ladies say over the years that verse 24 is a pretty high bar to achieve and our flesh want to fight against it, and I wouldn’t disagree – just as verse 25 keeps the bar high for husbands.

The picture of Christ giving Himself up for us is one of the most vivid backdrops of the Gospel. Not only did He give Himself up for us, He did this while we were still His enemies. (Romans 5:8)

This self-sacrificing love is to be our model for how we are to love others in general. In the context of a marriage relationship, it is the specific way the Father instructs husbands in how to view their responsibility as the “head of the home”.

So often people want to exercise “authority” outside of the framework of their responsibility. Jesus lived out His “authority” by embracing His responsibility. He didn’t come to be serve but to serve.

Matthew 20:25-28 *But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “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.”*

A husband’s self-sacrificing love for his wife is a picture of the self-sacrificing love we are called to exhibit as we walk in the Way of Jesus.

Paul then connects all of this under the umbrella of the principle of “leaving and cleaving”.

3) Leaving and “cleaving” (joining)

It’s interesting how the Father inspiring Paul to wrap up this section by referencing this scene in **Genesis 2**:

The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

It’s interesting to me that when the Father said this, He was speaking into the reality of the future, not the reality of the present - there were no mothers and fathers...Adam and Eve were not born through parental lineage, they were uniquely created by God.

Based on Paul’s statement in verse 32 (*This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church*) right after quoting Genesis 2, we can see that God was speaking in the future reality of Christ and the Church also, not just the procreation of children through parents.

As a husband and wife enter into the covenant of marriage, a new relationship is created that calls for a new identity, commitment, and cadence of life. The parting from the old “covering” and the embracing of a “new creation” through relationship, mutual submission, and self-sacrificing love. The two (former independent entities) form one new entity. This speaks of us when we enter into relationship covenant with Jesus as His Bride.

When we become Born-again, we leave our old “covering” – our natural ways, sinful nature, and independence. We cleave/join to Christ through the Gospel covenant and become “one flesh” – a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What a powerful and life changing truth and what better way to explain this to us in a very deep and practical way than to use the covenant of marriage as a natural model of the most incredible spiritual thing that can happen to a human – salvation through Christ.

Both are life changing, both take subjecting/submitting, self-sacrificing love, and leaving/cleaving.

Jesus wrapped it all up in this one explanation:

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”

Talk Story Discussion Questions

As you think about these questions, think about them in the two ways that Paul applies the principles of today’s Scriptures:

A) In context of marriage (if you aren’t married you can think about how these would apply to you if you were to get married – or don’t answer them in the context of marriage at all)

B) In context of your covenant relationship with Christ as part of His Bride, the Church.

1) How do you see your responsibility to “be subject” in the context of your marriage? If you are a woman, answer from your role as a wife and if you are a man, answer from your role as a husband.

2) How do you see your responsibility to “be subject” in the context of your relationship with Christ and as a part of His Church?

3) How do you see your responsibility to live with a self-sacrificing love, in context of your marriage? If you are a woman, answer from your role as a wife and if you are a man, answer from your role as a husband.

4) How do you see your responsibility to live with a self-sacrificing love, in context of your relationship with Christ and as a part of His Church?

5) How do you see your responsibility to “leave and cleave”, in context of your marriage? If you are a woman, answer from your role as a wife and if you are a man, answer from your role as a husband.

6) How do you see your responsibility to “leave and cleave”, in context of your relationship with Christ and as a part of His Church?