

RUF Bible Study – Ephesians
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Ephesians 5:21-33²

21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In John Mayer’s song, “Your Body Is a Wonderland” he sings:

We got the afternoon - You got this room for two - One thing I've left to do - Discover me Discovering you.

One mile to every inch of Your skin like porcelain - One pair of candy lips and Your bubblegum tongue

'Cause if you want love We'll make it - Swimming a deep sea Of blankets - Take all your big plans And break 'em - This is bound to be a while

Your body is a wonderland - Your body is a wonder (I'll use my hands) - Your body is a wonderland

Something 'bout the way the hair falls in your face - I love the shape you take when crawling towards the pillowcase

You tell me where to go and Though I might leave to find it I'll never let your head hit the bed Without my hand behind it

Is John Mayer talking about his wife or his girlfriend or a one night stand or what? Is he committed to her? Does that matter? What is she thinking of him? Is this another in a string of serial monogamous relationships?

These are wonderful lyrics properly placed. They stir up in us remembrances of the Bible’s Song of Solomon, where the beloved talks like this to his lover. We feel funny talking about this. If I were to read these lyrics aloud, you’d most likely have a little nervous laughter.

In the last three chapters of Ephesians, Paul writes about how the Christian life should be lived out. He does so on the foundation of the first three chapters, which deal with the grand themes and theology of Christianity and prayer. The last half of the second half (the application part), focuses on relationships within the Christian community. Applied Christianity is never a matter of the individual and God, but always involves other people.³ In God’s new society, God’s new people find themselves in new relationships – home, work and spiritual combat. Paul turns to these relationships now. So will we, starting first with the relationship between a husband and a wife.

In many ways this topic is really easy. I have a ton to say, perhaps too much. I will be holding up an ideal of marriage that Paul presents to us, a beautiful picture of what Christianity has for us if we give ourselves to Jesus and his ways.

But in many other ways, this passage is extremely difficult. I’ve been married to Julie for eleven years now, and I honestly don’t understand all of this. While we can see the ideal, we all live in its shattered remains. We’re broken sexually. We’ve experienced divorce and its effects on our lives. We have been told time and time again by people and the media that marriage just won’t work. We know, and have experienced, that men have oppressed and used women throughout history and still do today. We know that women manipulate and use men, and still do to this day. We are unsure and uneasy when Paul starts to talk about submission and headship, respect and love. We’d rather hear something different or explain this passage away.

So let’s begin with a few statements that will lay the groundwork.

God created men and women, and he called them each good. God created marriage, giving Adam and Eve to each other to be all and all for each other, to complement each other, to be best friends, to enjoy each other in a sexual way, and to bring children into the world. There was sex before the fall. It is not evil, wrong, bad or merely to be tolerated. It is good, very good. Marriage is the covenantal bond that God created to give the freedom and security in which we can best express our sexuality.

What we are looking at is obviously post-fall. Since Genesis 3, we have struggled with our own selves, with each other and with God. Nothing has gone untouched by this fall into sin. You have to feel the weight of that. Men have used women. Women have used men. Men have used women. We grieve over these things, call them wrong, and seek to make them right.

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² Sources: commentaries by Tom Wright, Peter O’Brien, John Stott, J.M. Boice; sermons by Rev. Tim Keller, Rev. Rob Rayburn, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson and Dr. Bryan Chapell

³ Boice, 190

But we must do so biblically. I am not going to be talking about an egalitarian marriage where men and women are viewed with no differences or no roles. I do not believe that is biblical, nor do I believe it will work.

But, I also will not be talking about a purely traditional marriage either where the man goes to work and the woman raises the children, cooks the meals and cleans the house. I do not believe that is biblical, nor do I believe it will work.

We want to see what the Bible says is God's way in marriage.

The happily submitting wife

And that means we need to start with the women's call – to submit to her husband in everything as to the Lord.

But let me back up a minute first. Look back to Ephesians 5:18-21: *18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Remember that Paul calls us to do something, but in a very strange way. He tells us we must “Be filled with the Spirit.” That is a present passive imperative, you must allow something to be done to you. And then he tells us how to be filled with the Spirit – addressing, singing, giving thanks and submitting. What follows in our passage here, in 5:21-33 is an overflow of 5:21.

I know this because the word “submit” isn't in the Greek in verse 22. It is okay for the translators to put it there, because the obvious sense of the meaning is to carry over from verse 21. But that means that verse 21 has to be there for our passage to make sense.

And so it is. The first thing we see when we look at the wife's role in marriage, as stated here in our text, is that is *all* of our roles with each other involve submission. We are *all* to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And Paul begins to explain how these submissive relationships play out in the categories of wife to husband, children to parents and slaves to masters.

So we acknowledge that we all submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. Male to female. Female to male. Parents, children, elders, non-elders, smart, not-as-smart, talented in numbers or mechanics, suburban or rural, cool to nerd, rich and poor, educated to non-educated, ancient and modern – ALL to each other.

Isn't that nice. But that's not all there is, is there? Paul doesn't leave it at that, but says: *22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* And later he writes in verse 33: *let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

A wife is to submit to her husband in everything because he is her head, and she is to respect him. What do you think about this? I would imagine, being modern people, you don't like it very much.

Let's talk about what it doesn't mean first. It doesn't mean that the wife cooks and cleans and makes babies and raises them and nothing else. It doesn't mean that a wife subordinates every desire she's ever had to her husbands, so that she never leaves the house, has no friends and no life. It doesn't mean she allows herself to be walked over, disrespected and used in the bedroom just to please her husband. It doesn't mean that she loses her dignity or equality in any way, that she is looked down on and thought of as inferior. These would be extreme examples of what we might think of in a “traditional” marriage. But it also doesn't mean nothing, the egalitarian view. It has to mean something, after all, or why say it?

What does it mean? It means that men and women have different roles in marriage, and these bring about the best for us as we accept our roles and glorify God in them. Roles do not signify value in and of themselves, as much as you have been taught to believe that they do.

I think that God gives out to many people the gift of pastor-teacher. Each of these people is responsible to use that gift in a way to bring about glory to God by teaching and shepherding God's people. Not all of those people will become ordained by the church as pastors, or in our denomination, Teaching Elders. Some of them will be on the session, what we call Ruling Elders. These men have these gifts and seek to serve the church with them, but they are not ordained to the same exact calling. But other men have the gift and use them to lead small groups, teach Sunday School, meet with people one-on-one and other things. And other people that have this gift are – women! Of course. Not only men have the gift of pastor-teacher but women do too. And they use their gifts in the church to lead and teach and shepherd God's people too. Are they less valuable and loved because they do not have the position of Teaching or Ruling Elder? I think not. They are just as valuable, needed and dignified. “Equality of worth is not identity of role.”⁴

The role of the wife to submit and respect the leadership of her husband does not relegate her to second best in the relationship. It cannot be so. Jesus submitted to the father. The Holy Spirit submits to both the father and the son. “Jesus Christ demonstrates rather than loses his dignity by his subordination to the Father. When a person is voluntarily amenable to another, gives way to him, and places himself at his service, he shows greater dignity and freedom than an individual who cannot bear to be a helper and partner to anyone but himself. Ephesians 5 supports anything but blind obedience or the breaking of the wife's will. Rather, this chapter shows that in the realm of a crucified Servant-Messiah, the subjects respect an order of freedom and equality in which one person assists another – seemingly by renouncing rights possessed, actually in exercising the right to imitate the Messiah himself... A greater, wiser, and more positive description of marriage has not yet been found in Christian literature.”⁵

⁴ JH Yoder, quoted by Stott, 218

⁵ M. Barth, quoted by Stott, 233

Thus, “submission is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society.”⁶ “The apostle addresses her as a free moral agent and calls upon her not to acquiesce in a fate she cannot escape, but to make a responsible decision before God.”⁷ And you have to see that “the subordination involved, particularly that of the wife, is voluntary. No women need accept the proposal of any man. However, if she does voluntarily accept that proposal and enters into matrimony (and she is a Christian woman, desiring what God declares she is to be), she thereby accepts the headship of her husband over her and promises submission to him.”⁸

This is not a bondage that women are put into, but a role of dignity and honor. Perhaps even one of liberation, freed to be who they are created to be. “On the contrary, to whom do women, children and workers chiefly owe their liberation? Is it not to Jesus Christ? It is Jesus Christ who treated women with courtesy and honor in an age in which they were despised. It is Jesus Christ who said, ‘Let the children come to me,’ in a period of history in which unwanted babies were consigned to the local rubbish dump (as they are today to the hospital incinerator), or abandoned in the forum for anyone to pick up and rear for slavery or prostitution. And it is Jesus Christ, who taught the dignity of manual labor by working himself as a carpenter, washing his disciples’ feet and saying, ‘I am among you as one who serves.’”⁹

The attempts to get around this fail by the simple weight of this passage. Paul writes that wives are to submit to their husbands *as to the Lord*. That isn’t cultural. He says that *23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands*. That is redemptive, and not cultural. When he writes: *31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”* he throws it into creational terms, connecting his argument all the way back to Genesis and the beginning of creation, which certainly isn’t cultural.

So what does this mean, for the wife to submit to her husband and to respect him? A wife’s submission to her husband is out a sense of her reverence with Christ, and a sense of holy awe is to come over her when she thinks of the responsibility of her husband. She is to bring all of her gifts, all of her talents, all of her mind, soul, body and strength, to bear on the relationship in order to hold up her husband and her family before the Lord. Submission is not the suppression of gifts – it is the expression of gifts in the behalf of others. When gifts get suppressed, they cannot be expressed in behalf of others. Submission is to “arrange under.” Not to throw away, not to abandon them, but to arrange them under the purpose of another.

What does it mean to submit to and respect her husband? It means that she puts her life under his. That she follows him as he follows Christ. That she trusts him. That she is open to him. That she comes to him and repents to him. That she doesn’t idolize him, but does think he is wonderful. That she puts her plans in subservience to his. That she offers up her desires to his. That she doesn’t take the reins and try to be lord of the house, but allows him to lead, helps him to lead, encourages him to lead, wants him to lead.

Many of your mothers don’t respect your fathers. Can you see that? They love them, but they don’t respect them. And that is a part of why your parents’ relationship is dysfunctional. If you don’t respect your husband, it cripples him, it emasculates him. And he will be particularly vulnerable to a woman who does show him respect – a colleague, a secretary, anyone who looks up to and admires him.

I realize it’s a confusing time to be a woman. You don’t know what to think. You don’t know how to act. You have more freedoms than any previous generation of women, but are not any happier.

Maureen Dowd recently came out with a book in which she muses over the seeming failure of feminism to capture its ideals. She fumes that women appear to want to go back to being idealized wives, but is frustrated that she herself isn’t a wife. Here is an excerpt from her article in the New York Times Sunday magazine from October 30, 2005:

Cosmo is still the best-selling magazine on college campuses, as it was when I was in college, and the best-selling monthly magazine on the newsstand. The June 2005 issue, with Jessica Simpson on the cover, her cleavage spilling out of an orange crocheted halter dress, could have been June 1970. The headlines are familiar: "How to turn him on in 10 words or less," "Do You Make Men M-E-L-T? Take our quiz," "Bridal Special," Cosmo's stud search and "Cosmo's Most Famous Sex Tips; the Legendary Tricks That Have Brought Countless Guys to Their Knees."

At any newsstand, you'll see the original Cosmo girl's man-crazy, sex-obsessed image endlessly, tiresomely replicated, even for the teen set. On the cover of Elle Girl: "267 Ways to Look Hot."

"There has been lots of copying - look at Glamour," Helen Gurley Brown, Cosmo's founding editor told me and sighed. "I used to have all the sex to myself."

Before it curdled into a collection of stereotypes, feminism had fleetingly held out a promise that there would be some precincts of womanly life that were not all about men. But it never quite materialized.

It took only a few decades to create a brazen new world where the highest ideal is to acknowledge your inner slut. I am woman; see me strip. Instead of peaceful havens of girl things and boy things, we have a society where women of all ages are striving to become self-actualized sex kittens. Hollywood actresses now work out by taking pole-dancing classes.

Female sexuality has been a confusing corkscrew path, not a serene progressive arc. We had decades of Victorian prudery, when women were not supposed to like sex. Then we had the pill and ziplless encounters, when women were supposed to have the same animalistic drive as men. Then it was discovered - shock, horror! - that men and women are not alike in their desires. But ziplless morphed into hookups, and the more one-night stands the girls on "Sex and the City" had, the grumpier they got.

Oddly enough, Felix Dennis, who created the top-selling Maxim, said he stole his "us against the world" lad-magazine attitude from women's magazines like Cosmo. Just as women didn't mind losing Cosmo's prestigious fiction as the magazine got raunchier, plenty of guys were

⁶ Stott, 218

⁷ Stott, 233

⁸ Boice, 199

⁹ Stott, 216

happy to lose the literary pretensions of venerable men's magazines and embrace simple-minded gender stereotypes, like the Maxim manifesto instructing women, "If we see you in the morning and night, why call us at work?"

Jessica Simpson and Eva Longoria move seamlessly from showing their curves on the covers of *Cosmo* and *Glamour* to Maxim, which dubbed Simpson "America's favorite ball and chain!" In the summer of 2005, both *British GQ* and *FHM* featured Pamela Anderson busting out of their covers. ("I think of my breasts as props," she told *FHM*.)

A lot of women now want to be Maxim babes as much as men want Maxim babes. So women have moved from fighting objectification to seeking it. "I have been surprised," Maxim's editor, Ed Needham, confessed to me, "to find that a lot of women would want to be somehow validated as a Maxim girl type, that they'd like to be thought of as hot and would like their boyfriends to take pictures of them or make comments about them that mirror the Maxim representation of a woman, the Pamela Anderson sort of brand. That, to me, is kind of extraordinary."

The luscious babes on the cover of Maxim were supposed to be men's fantasy guilty pleasures, after all, not their real life-affirming girlfriends.

While I never related to the unstyled look of the early feminists and I tangled with boyfriends who did not want me to wear makeup and heels, I always assumed that one positive result of the feminist movement would be a more flexible and capacious notion of female beauty, a release from the tyranny of the girdled, primped ideal of the 50's.

I was wrong. Forty years after the dawn of feminism, the ideal of feminine beauty is more rigid and unnatural than ever.

When Gloria Steinem wrote that "all women are Bunnies," she did not mean it as a compliment; it was a feminist call to arms. Decades later, it's just an aesthetic fact, as more and more women embrace Botox and implants and stretch and protrude to extreme proportions to satisfy male desires. Now that technology is biology, all women can look like inflatable dolls. It's clear that American narcissism has trumped American feminism.

It was naïve and misguided for the early feminists to tendentiously demonize Barbie and *Cosmo* girl, to disdain such female proclivities as shopping, applying makeup and hunting for sexy shoes and cute boyfriends and to prognosticate a world where men and women dressed alike and worked alike in navy suits and were equal in every way.

But it is equally naïve and misguided for young women now to fritter away all their time shopping for boudoirish clothes and text-messaging about guys while they disdainfully ignore gender politics and the seismic shifts on the Supreme Court that will affect women's rights for a generation.

What I didn't like at the start of the feminist movement was that young women were dressing alike, looking alike and thinking alike. They were supposed to be liberated, but it just seemed like stifling conformity.

What I don't like now is that the young women rejecting the feminist movement are dressing alike, looking alike and thinking alike. The plumage is more colorful, the shapes are more curvy, the look is more plastic, the message is diametrically opposite - before it was don't be a sex object; now it's be a sex object - but the conformity is just as stifling.

Having boomeranged once, will women do it again in a couple of decades? If we flash forward to 2030, will we see all those young women who thought trying to Have It All was a pointless slog, now middle-aged and stranded in suburbia, popping Ativan, struggling with rebellious teenagers, deserted by husbands for younger babes, unable to get back into a work force they never tried to be part of?

It's easy to picture a surreally familiar scene when women realize they bought into a raw deal and old trap. With no power or money or independence, they'll be mere domestic robots, lasering their legs and waxing their floors - or vice versa - and desperately seeking a new Betty Friedan.¹⁰

Writer Chuck Klosterman thinks some of the same things, albeit with a different, less pugilistic tone:

For the past twenty-five years, culture has been obsessed with making males and females more alike, and that's fine. Maybe it's even enlightened. But what I've noticed - at least among young people - is that this convergence has mostly just prompted females to adopt the worst qualities of men. It's like girls are trying to attain equality by becoming equally shallow and selfish. Whenever I see TV shows like Fox's defunct *Ally McBeal* or HBO's *Sex in the City*, I find myself perplexed as to how this is sometimes viewed as an "advancement" for feminism; it seems to imply that it's empowering for women to think like all of the stupidest men I know (myself included). We've all heard the argument that there is an eternal double standard about promiscuity. The cliché is that girls who sleep around are inevitably labeled 'sluts' while guys who make the rounds are dubbed 'studs' (in fact, I hear people making this particular point far more than I ever hear anyone literally calling women 'sluts' or men 'studs'). What's interesting about that argument is the what it's been absorbed by my generation [GenX] and all the generations that have followed: The consensus is that this double standard is wrong, so - therefore - we should all have sex with as many people as possible, regardless of our gender. Somehow, this became logical. And that's why modern fifteen-year-old girls are like fifteen-year-old boys from 1981: They're saturated not only with internal sexual intensity, but also with the social belief that they should be having sex. And this manifests itself in strange ways. In the 1960s, the Rolling Stones realized that if you could make an audience unconsciously think about [sex], you could control the way they respond to music. Mick and Keith manufactured sexual aggression. Van Halen didn't have to manufacture that sentiment, because their audience was already an ocean of lust, desperately wanting *The Big Loud Show*. In 1981, that ocean was adolescent boys. But Sarah Jessica Parker and Calista Flockhart have turned adolescent girls into adolescent boys, and those girls want their own Van Halen. And their version of Van Halen is Marie Seidel [of *The Dixie Chicks*] playing "Eruption" on a fiddle.¹¹

That is all well and good, but what do I do about this NOW? You want to know. I need to say something.

Women, I will tell you this. You need to embrace this passage and how God has created you as woman in all of your glory. You are a special creation. You need to be glad God created you as girls and you have grown up to be women, and you need to think that all that goes along with that is tremendously grand and amazing.

You need to pursue a biblical, not a traditional or an egalitarian, marriage. You need to submit to and respect your husband. You need to be on the lookout for your temptation for wife to use her words or position to diminish his role. You need to be wary of thinking that the text says: Wives submit to your husbands, *if they are worth submitting to* in your judgment. You need to be talking with mature, Christian women whom you respect to see what this might mean.

¹⁰ From The New York Times, October 30, 2005, by Maureen Dowd

¹¹ Chuck Klosterman, from *Sex Drugs and Cocoa Puffs*, 178-179

And you need to marry a man whom you can follow. Until you're married, you're not married. Paul doesn't say that you must submit to your boyfriend. So don't. But you can practice following him. Is he worthy to be followed? That doesn't mean that he is perfect and never makes mistakes, because he will. But is he seeking the Lord? Is he listening to the Holy Spirit, so that he would hear God and repent when and if he is wrong? Is he in community? Does he worship? Does he read and submit to the Word of God in his life? Does he have good friends? Can he say he's sorry? Is he diligent and faithful? Does he care about and listen to you? Does he want to help others? Is he selfish or giving? Does he idolize career or money or sex or anything?

Those are the things you should be looking for. If you marry someone who will make you look good, or a guy who is successful, or promises a perfect life, and he *doesn't love Jesus Christ first and foremost with all of his life*, then you will not be happy. You have to get your categories right on this. Don't just let him say he's a Christian and loves Christ, but watch him do it. And the thing you most want to see, I guarantee you, is that he leads in repentance.

Follow that man. Give yourself to him. Open yourself up to him. Respect him. Submit to him.

The Jesusly leading husband

Now it's time to turn to the men. I have a lot to say here, but some of it was implied in speaking to the women.

Let's first look at what Paul says to husbands: *25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

It's funny. We have to admit that men have abused their roles as leaders, as the more physically powerful gender. But I'd say that men these days, and I don't know how it works throughout time, actually shy away from being leaders. I see men giving over this role rather happily to women, who are more than happy to take it from them. Women don't respect men, so they want lead. Men don't want to love their wives so they want to follow and let women do it all.

Men, you have to be glad God made you as boys and you have grown up to be men. You need to embrace your masculinity and all that goes along with that and see it as created by God and called good.

Men, you have to lead. The Bible says that you must, and should. Are you willing? Are you going to take up your responsibility and role in this? I think many men know that they are not intrinsically better than women, and of course they are right in that. So, their logic goes, if I am not better, then why should I lead and not her? So I'll let her, since she wants to anyway, and we'll all be happier in the long run.

I think that makes some degree of sense, and am often tempted to do so myself, but it is wrong. I have married a very talented, capable, intelligent and beautiful wife – and I am called to be her head, to represent her, to lead her.

What does this not mean? We've said this before, but it doesn't mean that the husband is to make all the money and come home to boss his wife around. This doesn't mean that he is to make all the decisions. It doesn't mean that he can do whatever he wants and she has to deal with it, to mold her life around his. It doesn't mean he gets to demand sexual favors from her. It doesn't mean he can dominate her in any way. But, it doesn't mean nothing. It means something.

What does it mean? It means that he is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. A husband has an authority, and authority is never to be used selfishly, but only for the benefit of others. Authority is not a synonym for tyranny.

Paul says that a husband is to love her as Christ loved the church. What does this mean? "Let me try to tell you what it really should mean if a fellow says to a girl, 'I love you.' It means: You, you, you. You alone. You shall reign in my heart. You are the one whom I have longed for, without you I am incomplete. I will give everything to you, and I will give up everything for you, myself as well as all that I possess. I will love you alone, and I will work for you alone. And I will wait for you... I will never force you, not even by my words. I want to guard you, protect you and keep you from all evil. I want to share with you all my thoughts, my heart and my body – all that I possess. I want to listen to what you have to say. There is nothing I want to undertake without your blessing. I want to remain always at your side."¹²

A husband is to love his wife as Christ did, by giving himself up for her. It means that he puts his life under hers. That he follows her as she follows Christ. That he trusts her. That he is open to her. That he comes to her and repents to her. That he doesn't idolize her, but does think she is wonderful. That he puts his plans in subservience to hers. That he offers up his desires to her. That he doesn't take the reins and try to be lord of the house in a tyrannical way, but leads graciously, thoughtfully, patiently, always seeking the good of his wife and family.

A husband who is giving himself up for his wife helps to clear the table. He helps to make the bed and fold the clothes. A wife has told her husband, "Dear, I know that you are willing to die for me; you have told me that many times. But while you are waiting to die, could just fill in some of the time by helping me dry the dishes?"¹³

¹² Walter Trobisch, quoted by Boice, 200

¹³ Boice, 201

A husband is to love his wife as Christ did, and Christ's goal is to make her holy. The word holy is "hagios" and means "to sanctify" or "to set apart." A saint, a holy one, is one set apart wholly for God, which is what Jesus desires for the church. A husband needs to want his wife's sole affection, and also wants her relationship with God to always grow deeper and fuller.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ did by cleansing her through the washing of the word. While this may sound like a command to take showers together, it actually means that he is responsible for her spiritual growth and nurturing. And that doesn't mean it's always going to feel like a bubble bath. Women, you cannot expect cleansing to always feel like that. Many times Jesus loves us by scrubbing us with bristles, with a strong loofa sponge, with a coarse brush to get deep into the pores. Just as we said we must speak the truth in love, we must cleanse each other, and here Paul says it is the husband's responsibility to see it is done.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ did by presenting her as a radiant bride without blemish. He is proud of her. He makes her flourish and shine, and never seeks to stifle or diminish her. He brings out the best in her, like a bride on her wedding day, having been taken care of and made even more stunning than she naturally is. "A husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself up for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself."¹⁴

A wife's submission is to be given to a lover, not an ogre. The husband is to love like Christ. The husband's love, like Christ's, sacrifices in order to serve. The wife's submission is but another aspect of love. Husbands will be tempted to read this text as - love your wife, *if she is worthy of love* in your opinion. It says - love your wife no matter what.

The temptation for husbands is going to be to use his strength, either his body or his position to hurt her role; he's going to be dictator, or to abdicate his responsibility altogether and let her lead. If he does that, he isn't loving her. Many of your fathers don't really love your mothers. They respect them like crazy. But they don't love them. He comes home and slinks off to his room, watching sports all day, or reading the paper, or watching the stocks, or tinkering with his projects, or playing golf, or planning his next business move. His wife is lonely for companionship, wanting intimacy and desiring to be loved.

If he doesn't give it to her, she is in danger of giving herself to another man, one who will show her the love and affection she so desperately craves.

Paul says: *28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body.*

You wash, bathe, feed, exercise, train, comb, deodorize, and all sorts of other things to your body. Husbands, love you wife more than you love yourself. Christ loved the church so much that he gave himself up for her so that she could become his bride, and that means us.

When Paul discusses marriage, he doesn't change the cultural expectation for wives, children and slaves, but he does changes the motivation - it is now out of reverence.

Likewise, Paul doesn't remove the authority from the husbands, parents and masters, but he does makes a clear redefinition of it - exercising the authority as you submit to one another. Submission is to what God wants to accomplish in the others and in yourself as you express your authority. Men are to be servant leaders, and that is different. They are to lead like Christ, which means leadership is to the cross to die for someone else.

Before we get to the church, let me make a few applications. I hope I've help you understand this scripture. I certainly am not saying it's easy. In fact, this is one of the most complex and crazy relationships you'll ever have. Sex can be wonderful and it can be terrible. It won't solve all your problems. Marriage won't solve your problems either. The way you date or court or don't date or how you date won't solve your problems. Jesus is your only answer. He is what you need.

So look to him first. In one sense, if you are in him, you can relax. You can be single right now and be the best single man or woman you can be because that is what he has called you to. Develop your gifts. Pursue your calling. Go on dates. Become friends. Hold everything with an open hand - your future, your career, your job, your sexuality, your desires. Allow God to mold them, don't hold them so tight you squeeze the life out of them.

And look for a guy or a gal who loves Jesus. One who repents. One who loves the Word and the church. One who submits to one another out of reverence for Christ. If you aren't submitting now, what makes you think it will be easy and fun to submit then? If you aren't respecting and loving now, why do you think it will be natural to do so then?

Practice leading. Practice following. Allow grace to speak into your lives. Keep your hands to yourself. Be in a community. Men, lead out and ask these women on dates. That isn't the same as dating. Don't sexualize everything, but go out and get to know each other. If you start to like a gal more particularly and want to start dating, ask her to do that, but tell her what you mean by it. Gals, if you want to go out on a date, say yes. Don't futurize everything and turn down a date because a guy isn't one you might marry. If he keeps asking you, then say no. If you don't want to start dating him, then don't.

When you do get married, make sure you talk about your expectations. They will get you if you don't, for you have a ton of them lurking around unsaid and unstated. Those are so often the things you'll fight over, be crushed by, and they'll kill you in the end of you don't sort them out. How do you expect to be loved? How do you expect respect to get communicated? How do expect chores to be done? What kind of house do you expect to keep? What lifestyle do you expect to have? How many night a week do you expect him to be away? How many times a week do you expect to have sex and what do you expect sex to look and feel like? Where do you expect him to put his toothbrush? Where do you expect her to put your shaving cream?

¹⁴ Stott

These are the things of life. And commit to talk about them, never threatening divorce or walking out of the house. Commit to be willing to repent and to seek counsel and advice. Commit to marriage counseling when you need it, or when the other person thinks you need it.

The happily submitting and Jesusly loving church

All along we've been thinking about Jesus. If you were married to Jesus, like actually he was your husband, do you think you could submit to him? Do you think he might be a great husband in this life? Do you think you would always like what he said to you or that you might sometimes wish he would leave you alone? I would imagine we might get pretty frustrated, but that we would also always know that he loved us. I would think we might sometimes get pretty confused as to why he did the things he did, but that it would become clear as he loved us and sacrificed for us, as he showed us his tremendous patience.

We've talked about how Jesus submitted his will without sacrificing his dignity. We talked about how he loved in such a way as to present his bride holy and blameless.

And then Paul goes and says this: "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

At least Paul admits that the mystery is profound. He says this: Here are instructions for being filled with the Spirit, and one of those is submission. In a marriage mutual submission is played out as the wife particularly submits and respects her husband and the husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church. Oh wait, I'm not talking about marriage at all – I'm talking about Jesus and his love for his bride, the church.

Huh?

I won't belabor this point, except to say that it seems to me that we have to make the same applications to the church that we were previously making to wives and husbands.

Do you submit to the church? Can you show me one way in which you bow your desires to the church? Your time? Your gifts? Your future? Something. Do you submit to the church? If not, it will be very difficult for you to understand to submission to your husband or to your wife.

Do you respect the church? Do you laugh at her behind her back, belittle her in front of others? Are you embarrassed by her, always trying to correct her to your view of what she should be? Or do you show her the respect she deserves because of her position, however fallen she is? How do you respect the church?

Do you love the church? Show me how you love the church? Have you committed to her in any way? Do you reorder one minute or one hour of your day for her? Have you taken vows to her, or are you still only dating, retaining your independence? Will you take your gifts and talents and lay them at her feet? Will you give her your best?

It seems to me that a lot of this relational stuff would make more sense if we began to practice it in the church, as the bride related to the bridegroom, as we love Jesus in real ways in real life in real time. Really. He is our bridegroom and husband; we submit to him out of reverence for him.

O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

1. O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward
To Thy glorious rest above!

2. O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Spread His praise from shore to shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth,
Changeth never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones,
Died to call them all His own;
How for them He intercedeth,
Watcheth o'er them from the throne!

3. O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean vast of blessing,
'Tis a haven sweet of rest!
O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
'Tis a heaven of heavens to me;
And it lifts me up to glory,
For it lifts me up to Thee!