

How to Make Love Last:

Nurturing a Christ-Centered Marriage

Please take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Ephesians, a familiar passage we've been exploring. Let's begin reading at Chapter 5, verse number 21.

submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:21-24)

Mutual Submission within Marriage

Our focus today is on this theme of mutual submission, particularly within the context of husbands and wives.

The term "submitting" is worth pondering. Let's call this message "Headship, not Dictatorship." Actually, here's an even catchier title: "Who Controls the Remote?" A bit of humor there, but it reflects a genuine question about authority within our families.

But let's delve into the heart of the matter. In its essence, submission means giving over or yielding to the power or authority of another. The Bible calls wives to submit to their husbands, and yes, I know this topic can generate some anticipation among the men here.

The True Meaning of Submission

Before we continue, let's clarify what submission means. It is a voluntary act, not something imposed by an overbearing husband with a caveman mentality. No, it is a willing choice made by the wife to respect the leadership of her husband in the family, just as Christ leads the church.

Submission doesn't imply that women are inferior or men are superior; it's not about hierarchy. Instead, it emphasizes equality within God's roles for the husband and wife. In a Christian home, where both partners are committed to

God, this mutual respect and authority work hand in hand. The husband's responsibility is to love, provide, protect, and serve his wife and family with sacrificial love, mirroring the love Christ demonstrated on the cross.

Fostering a Christ-Centered Marriage

God does not command wives to obey their husbands in the same way He tells children to obey their parents or slaves to obey their masters. Instead, they are encouraged to willingly submit to their husbands in recognition of the God-given authority in the family. It's about unity and oneness, just as we find in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. Similarly, in the marriage of a man and a woman, there is a oneness, a unity that shouldn't be a constant battle for control.

In today's world, humanistic, genderless philosophies attempt to undermine the authority God established in various realms of life, including the family. But let's remain steadfast in God's design for marriage—one man, one woman, united in love and mutual respect. This is the foundation for a Christ-centered home.

The concept of submission in a marriage is not about hierarchy or a power struggle. It's about understanding the operation of authority—how it is given and received.

Jesus, the perfect example, taught His disciples not to exert authority in a domineering way or seek greatness at the expense of others. Yet, even they struggled to grasp this, as they argued over which of them was the greatest, even in the presence of Jesus at the Last Supper.

True leadership is not about lording over others but about using authority to serve and build up those under it. Jesus exemplified this when He washed His disciples' feet, showing that the greatest among us is the one who serves others. Submission, therefore, is not a sign of weakness but of strength, as it reflects Christ's character.

Within a marriage, submission is vital, but it's often misunderstood. It's important to note that submission doesn't make a wife a slave or someone waiting for commands. Instead, it's a voluntary act of respect and love for her husband's God-given role in the family. The goal is unity, harmony, and shared responsibilities within a team effort.

Submission in a marriage is grounded in two reasons. First, it stems from the wife's commitment to the Lordship of Christ. As a Christian, she willingly submits herself to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second, submission is an acknowledgment of the husband's role as the head of the family, entrusted by God to lead and manage the household. This mutual respect and authority, coupled with both partners living under the Lordship of Christ, creates a harmonious and happy home.

Anarchy in a family with no established authority leads to chaos and discord. As the head of the household, the husband plays a significant role in making decisions and providing direction. This doesn't mean the wife is inferior or a mere servant; it is a mutual arrangement built on love, respect, and understanding. When both partners understand and embrace their roles in the marriage, they can function as a unified team, making decisions together.

The Cultural Context of Marriage in Paul's Time

It's essential to differentiate biblical submission from cultural views that might promote inequality between genders. The Bible doesn't endorse chauvinism or male dominance. Instead, it emphasizes mutual love, respect, and servanthood in a Christ-centered marriage. This perspective aligns with God's original design for the family, where husbands and wives work together, respecting and supporting one another to create a loving and harmonious home.

In conclusion, understanding and embracing the biblical concept of submission is critical to fostering a healthy and God-honoring marriage. A Christ-centered marriage is marked by mutual love, respect, and harmony, with both partners serving and supporting each other in love. When a husband leads sacrificially, and a wife submits willingly, the home becomes a little piece of heaven on earth—a place of peace, joy, and love.

In the cultural context of Paul's time, the rabbis had different views regarding the reasons for divorce. Some believed that divorce was only permissible in cases of adultery, while others allowed it for any reason at all. These views contributed to a high divorce rate during that era.

Let's talk about the Greeks and the Romans. Both of these ancient cultures had some troubling practices regarding marriage and relationships.

In the Greek world, divorce wasn't even a formal process because it was considered unnecessary. Wives were generally seen as only suitable for housekeeping and bearing legitimate children. Greek men often sought pleasure outside of their marriages through fornication and prostitution, which was widespread in their society. So, when Paul addressed husbands and wives, he had to consider the culture of the time and the place they lived in.

The Romans had an even worse marital situation. Divorce wasn't an exception. It was the norm. The "when in Rome" mentality led to marriages breaking up at the drop of a hat. For instance, there's a story of one Roman woman who had married and divorced an astonishing 23 times. Can you imagine that? It's hard to fathom, but it happened.

For the Romans, marriage had lost its sanctity and turned into something akin to legalized prostitution. The cycle was simple: get married, stay together until you got bored, then divorce and marry someone else. This mindset was the prevalent view of marriage in the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures of that time.

Elevating the Concept of Marriage

However, Jesus and Paul challenged these prevailing cultural norms by calling husbands and wives to a revolutionary new standard for their time. They elevated the concept of marriage, emphasizing mutual submission, love, and respect. They taught that in Christ, there is no distinction between genders; all are equal before God.

Paul's instruction that wives submit to their husbands as to the Lord doesn't imply that women are inferior or should be treated as slaves. Instead, it calls for voluntary respect and support in a Christ-centered marriage. Similarly, God instructs husbands to love their wives sacrificially, just as Christ loved the church.

The essence of a godly marriage lies in mutual submission, with each partner fulfilling their God-given roles in the relationship. Both husband and wife have responsibilities toward each other and God. The wife's submission is not about what she does for her husband but about recognizing and respecting the leadership and love that God calls the husband to provide.

Fulfilling God-Given Roles

True unity in a marriage comes from the husband leading with sacrificial love and the wife willingly yielding to her husband's leadership. This model of Christ-centered marriage transcends cultural norms and societal pressures.

As believers, our marriages should reflect Christ's love for the church. God calls us to walk in unity, harmony, and wholehearted respect for one another. This biblical view of marriage challenges the prevailing norms of the world and calls us to a higher standard—a standard rooted in God's design for the family.

Embrace God's Radical Vision for Marriage

In conclusion, I urge you to embrace God's radical vision for marriage, which elevates the roles of husband and wife, emphasizing love, respect, and mutual submission. When both partners commit themselves to the Lord and each other in this way, they create a home that reflects God's love, grace, and harmony. Let us strive to follow God's design for marriage, knowing that in Christ, we find true equality and unity.