

Marriage, God's Way (Part 1) – Eph 5:22-33

We're 4 weeks into our **Happy To Be Stuck With You** series on marriage
We're gonna talk about the "S" word this morning – not sex, but submission
Another one of those hot topics that could easily be classified as an "untouchable"

But it begs to be addressed; B/c when we do **Marriage, God's Way** . . .
When we fulfill our roles and responsibilities according to his design . . .
We honor him, grow closer together, and avoid trouble
And who doesn't want that?

➤ Having said that, it's important to keep in mind that these biblical roles in marriage, do not denote privilege or rank
The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are *equal* in value and *equal* in worth
Get that right; Now; Or you'll get the whole thing wrong

Both the husband and the wife are created in God's image (Gen 1:27)
Both, as followers of Christ, have the same standing before God
Both have full access to him as his children
And both are full heirs of his promised blessings – including eternal life (Gal 3:28-29)
Equal in value and *equal* in worth
But, as we'll find out in this passage, *different* in roles and responsibilities

So let's turn in our Bibles to Eph 5:22-33, and get at it (read it)
➤ There are two main points regarding roles in marriage from this passage
The first is that wives should submit to their husbands
And the second is that husbands should love their wives
Two sides of the same coin

We're going to look at only one side this week – that's from the wife's perspective
3 weeks from now we'll look at it from the husband's perspective
And it's critical that you put them together, and *keep* them together
Otherwise you're going to have a messed up view of marriage
And fail to fulfill your responsibilities, God's way

So, starting where Paul starts in v22 . . .
Wives – submit to your husband (v22-24)
Read v22; As in – voluntarily yield to his leadership and discretion
That's what submission means

It doesn't mean you have to put your will to death, or permanently zip your lip
It's not spineless consent, or degrading humiliation, or demeaning servitude, or passive resignation
Biblical, God-honoring submission is a voluntary disposition and inclination on the part of a wife, to yield to the authority and discretion of her husband
It's an attitude of her *heart* to *want* to follow her husband . . .
And an inclination of her *will* to say *yes* to his initiatives

Which means that grudging submission is not biblical submission
That doesn't honor God in the least
God-honoring submission is born of desire, not drudgery

➤ The problem is, we chafe against the whole thing
Desire *or* drudgery, some people hate the mere thought of it
They don't even like *admitting* that they're under someone else's authority . . .
Let alone *submit* to it
Consequently, they go to great lengths to explain it away

For instance . . .

• **Some say this doesn't apply to us because it's cultural**
They agree that submission in the context of marriage means that a wife should voluntarily yield to the authority and discretion of her husband . . .
But say it was only for the *first* century

And, in a general sense, there's legitimate biblical precedent for that
That is, for saying that some things in the Bible are cultural, and therefore are not required of us anymore
Like wearing a head covering in 1 Cor 11; Or washing people's feet in Jn 13
Or greeting one another with a holy kiss
We don't do those things anymore – why?

B/c the acts themselves are not the point
The acts are meant to symbolize timeless truths/principles, that *are* the point
And if the symbol/action no longer means what it used to, it's a moot point to continue doing it, b/c it shows nothing

➤ For instance, 1 Cor 11:10 says that head coverings for women were a *symbol of authority*
A symbol that a woman was under the authority of her husband
That's apparently what a head covering in 1st century Roman culture, symbolized
Kind of like a ring symbolizes your commitment in marriage, today

B/c of that, Paul says that a wife should have her head covered in church so as not to dishonor her husband
In fact, I want to look at that passage briefly – 1 Cor 11:2-10

This passage is used/abused to dismiss more biblical standards, than any other in the Bible
"If head coverings in 1 Cor 11 were cultural, how come homosexuality isn't cultural?"
"Or Paul's prohibition against women as elders, or pastors, or deacons"
"Or the submission of a wife to her husband?" (read it)
So I want to take a minute to help you understand why head coverings in 1 Cor 11 *are* cultural, while submission in Eph 5, isn't

3 – several layers of headship
4-5 – play on words (head/head); leaves us scratching our head b/c head coverings mean nothing to us when it comes to praying and prophesying in church
6 – if she's going to act like a man, she just as well look like one
But since that would bring shame to both herself *and* her husband, just put a hat on
7 – Since a man's authority is Christ and he lives to magnify him, he shouldn't wear a hat
b/c a hat indicates that his authority is someone other than the Lord
On the other hand, a wife *should* wear a hat, b/c it communicates that she wants to make her *husband* look good by showing her submission and respect for his headship

8-9 – he bases this whole concept of headship on the order of creation and its purpose
Which is something that never changes; Therefore, neither is headship

10 – b/c the whole host of heaven is looking on
They're watching to see if she fulfills her role as God designed it

All that to say, if a wife in 1st century Corinth didn't wear a hat, she was communicating
that her husband is not her authority, and that she doesn't respect him
Which would greatly dishonor him; Not to mention God
That's what the lack of a hat on a woman, conveyed in those days – it conveyed a lack of
respect and submission

But that's not what a woman's hat, or lack thereof, means in *our* culture
A hat today is simply a fashion statement, if it's worn at all
It's a way for a woman to adorn herself just like she does with jewelry or anything else
So to wear a hat as a symbol of authority, would be totally lost on people . . .
Making it a moot point, b/c it shows or symbolizes nothing

So the first consideration in determining whether a command is cultural or timeless, is to
determine *whether the prescribed action means the same thing today as it did then*
If it doesn't, like with head coverings, it's possible that the command is cultural, and
doesn't apply to us

➤ The second consideration in determining whether a command is cultural/timeless is this
Can the principle be separated from the practice?
Or, can the principle be lived out or demonstrated equally well, in other ways?

For instance, in the case of head coverings, are there better ways (at least better in our
day and age) for a woman to show her honor and respect for her husband?
Clearly the answer is yes
Like how she talks about her husband; How she looks at him; How she dresses when
he's not around; How she interacts with other men
All of those things show honor and respect for her husband (or a lack thereof), far more
than wearing a hat – a hat doesn't show anything in our culture

So yes, when it comes to headship and respect in 1 Cor 11 – the principle can be separated
from the practice, and demonstrated equally well in other ways

But the same cannot be said of submission in Eph 5
B/c submission *is* the principle at stake; It *is* the very thing being commanded
There's no symbolic action that *shows* submission; It's just, submit

It would be like 1 Cor 11 saying that women should show their respect for their husband's
headship, without any mention of a head covering
If that were the case, there would be no discussion
But it doesn't

Nor does Eph 5 say, “wives, S to your husband by sitting on the other side of the church”
Or “submit to your husband by walking 3 feet behind him”
If it did, you could dismiss those actions as cultural b/c they don't mean the same thing
now as they did then

But you could not dismiss your responsibility to submit, b/c just like with headship in 1
Cor 11, submission is based on something that never changes

➤ And that's the final consideration in determining whether something is cultural/timeless
What is the basis for the command?
If it's something that's temporary or changing – it can be dismissed
But if it's something that's timeless, it can't

And that's the case here in Eph 5
Paul bases his command for wives to submit to their husbands on something that never
changes – something that's true for all time in all places
Namely, Christ's headship over the church

22 – *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*
And then he says “For” – indicating that what follows is the reason or the basis for his
previous command
For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church (23)

Christ's headship and the church's submission to him has nothing to do with the
calendar year, the culture, or your specific circumstances
Christ's headship over the church is cross-cultural and timeless
And therefore, so is a wife's submission to her husband
It's for *all* time and *all* places, despite what some would say

Others will say, “okay, okay, I got that; it's not cultural”
Instead, they . . .

• **Some try to change the meaning of the word**
And thereby diminish its significance

They say *head* in v23 means *source*, instead of authority (read v22-23)
IOW just as Christ is the *source* of the church, so too the husband is the *source* of his
wife
Which makes submit mean something like “draw from” instead of “yield to”
(Read v24, substituting “draw from” for submit) – whatever that means

More than a fuzzy meaning, the problem w/ that line of interpretive gymnastics, is that . . .
Extensive word studies covering more than 50 examples of the word *head* in ancient
Greek literature (kephale in Gr) . . .
Show that when person A is *head* of person B, person A always has *authority* over
person B
So *head* means authority – it's special pleading to say otherwise
It's just avoiding the uncomfortable truth

And then there's a third group who . . .
• **Some render the whole thing meaningless**
Some say it doesn't apply because it's cultural
Some try to change the meaning of the word
Some render the whole thing meaningless

They say that *mutual* submission is in view here

That, from v21 where it says that we are to submit *to one another*

IOW they would say that the wife is to submit to the husband, and the husband to the wife
And while it sounds good, it's meaningless
B/c the definition of the word *submit*, doesn't allow for it

Here again, in the 40 or so NT uses of submission (*hypotasso*) . . .

It's used to describe the position of one person under the authority of another, by virtue of their roles

So *mutual* submission would be a contradiction of terms

2 people cannot submit to one another at the same time, in the same way

➤ Now, does that mean that God contradicts himself in the space of two lines here in v21 and 22? No

B/c the phrase *one another* in v21, doesn't always imply mutuality – or mutual submission in this case

There are several instances in the NT where it implies “as appropriate”

Like confess your sins to one another – that's not only impossible to do with every single person, but it wouldn't be appropriate

So the sense is confess your sins to one another “as appropriate”

Which must also be the case here – *submit to one another* [as appropriate] *out of reverence for Christ*

Otherwise the meaning of *submit* would have to change, and we have no indication of that in the text, nor any precedent for it in the Bible

➤ Not only that, but if mutual submission were in view here, then the analogy of Christ and the church would be meaningless, b/c Christ doesn't submit to us

We submit to him

Look at v25, it says – *Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church*

Not *submit* to your wives as Christ *submits* to the church – that's meaningless b/c it doesn't happen

So by definition and analogy, mutual submission in the same way at the same time, cannot be in view here – it's meaningless to say otherwise

Which brings us right back to where we started from . . .

Wives should voluntarily yield to the leadership and discretion of their husband

And do so . . .

• **In everything (v24)**

Read v24; This means even when you don't feel like it; Even when you disagree

Even when he's being dumb; Even when he's going to make a bad decision

Submit to him in everything

That in no way, however, means you should remain silent

That *may be* the best approach in some situations . . .

But most of the time you should express your opinion, and the decision should be made *together*

Husbands, did you hear that?

Rarely should you be making a unilateral decision, especially one that's contrary to your wife's thinking

But if he does, wives, it doesn't relieve you of your responsibility to submit

To which you might be thinking . . .

➤ What if my husband is a jerk? What if he doesn't *deserve* my submission?

His lack of love toward you, does not excuse your lack of submission toward him

God will hold him responsible for his role, and you for yours

Becky likes to say in those cases, that your submission is like bowing down before your husband so God can get better aim☺

Do the right thing, jerk or not

Or you might be wondering . . .

➤ What if he asks me to do something wrong, or is putting our family at risk?

Do I still have to submit to him in that? No; That's where you draw the line

You *cannot* follow him into sin, or fail to do what's right

That would be putting your submission to *him* ahead of your submission to God

In those cases, you should lovingly but firmly resist, b/c anything else just enables him

But even in resisting, you should show him and tell him of your dislike in doing so

And express to him your longing to see him lead in righteousness

One more thing . . .

➤ What if he's hurting me physically?

First of all, biblical submission is not *doormat theology* where you let him walk all over you no matter what

If he's hurting you physically – call the police and call the church

God established the church as an instrument of holiness in our lives . . .

And he established the government as an instrument of protection

So take advantage of them if he's hurting you, and don't wait; Get help now

Short of that, and short of him asking you to do something wrong . . .

Submit to your husband in everything – that's marriage, God's way

Secondly, submit to your husband . . .

• **As your leader (v23)**

Read v23; Just as Christ is the leader, authority, provider, and protector of the church

So too, the husband is God's designated leader, authority, provider, and protector of you and your family

Follow him in that; Yield to him in that; Depend on him for that; Trust him in that

And if he doesn't lead, or is passive in his role – *don't* take the reins

He'll *never* lead if you do that; It will just make the problem worse

Aggressive leadership on the wife's part actually *contributes* to passivity on the husband's

Don't do it – let things fall through the cracks and tell him you're going to do so

If you continue to compensate for his lack of responsibility or laziness, he'll just continue to wallow in it
Let it show; Sometimes 2 steps backward, *is* the way forward

And if he still doesn't step up and wear the pants – then get some help
B/c he's neglecting you, and abdicating his responsibility before God
Just make sure you're *not* wearing the pants, so that he *can*

Submit to your husband – in everything, as your leader, and third . . .

- **As to Christ (v22,24)**

22 – *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*

Just like you submit to Jesus, submit to your husband; And . . .

24 – *As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands*

Wives, God's design is that you submit to your husband just like you submit to Christ – joyfully and fully
If you don't, something's wrong – and it's not just with your husband

Far too many wives fail to submit to their husbands b/c they fail to submit to Christ
Far too many wives have an authority issue with their husbands b/c they have an authority issue with God
If you don't fully submit to him, you'll *never* fully submit to your husband
It's critical that you get your relationship with *Jesus* right, if you're going to have any hope of getting your relationship with your *husband* right

Submit to your husband *as to Christ* – joyfully and completely

- **With respect (v33)**

33 (read it) – *Let the wife see that she respects her husband*
IOW you should hold your husband in the highest regard

To which you might say – “you obviously don't know my husband”
And you'd be right, I don't
But I do know that your respect for him will go a long way toward encouraging his worthiness to receive it

It's kind of like positive reinforcement for a child – it encourages good behavior
The same is true of your respect for your husband – it encourages him to be worthy to receive it

➤ Do you know why? B/c he *desperately* wants to know that you look up to him and admire him
He's desperate for it; Just like you're desperate for his love
He wants to know that you think highly of him

And if you're constantly nagging at him, or are mad at him . . .
He interprets that as *lack* of respect – which it probably is
But even if it's not, that's how he sees it

And instead of changing, his tendency will be to withdraw and find it elsewhere
Address his issues and his weaknesses, absolutely
God has put you in one another's lives as instruments of sanctification
And husbands, you need to receive your wife's counsel, and listen to it

But wives, offer it without disrespecting him – at the right time, with the right tone, and the right motive
Timing, tone, and motive
Do that, and you'll go a long way toward submitting to your husband