

## **Marriage Matters**

Rev. Brian Bill

Ephesians 5:21-33

April 13-14, 2024

I heard about what happened at a golden wedding anniversary party for a couple. The husband was very moved by the occasion and wanted to share his feelings with his wife. She was hard of hearing, however, and often misunderstood what he said. With many family members and friends gathered around, he toasted her and said, *“My dear wife, after 50 years I’ve found you tried and true!”*

Everyone clapped and cheered for them, but his wife looked irritated and asked, *“What did you say?”* So he repeated it again, this time with more volume: *“AFTER 50 YEARS, I’VE FOUND YOU TRIED AND TRUE!”*

The wife, now visibly upset, shouted back, *“Well, let me tell you something – after 50 years I’m TIRED OF YOU, TOO!”*

It’s easy for married couples to get tired of each other by settling into predictable routines where both spouses stop listening and loving.

It was Henny Youngman who said, *“The secret of a happy marriage remains a secret.”*

Is there a secret to a meaningful marriage, where a wife is secure in her husband’s love and a husband knows he is significant because his wife respects him? Is it possible to have a tried and true marriage?

Before we jump in, I want to mention two things.

- Due to the depth of the Book of Ephesians and its application to our lives, I’ve been led to extend this sermon series so we can slow down and plumb its depths. This is actually the second time I’ve expanded the series. When we’re finished, I believe there will be six more sermons than I had planned.
- About four years ago, in the middle of the pandemic, I preached on this same passage from Ephesians. Since many did not hear this message, I’ve decided to revise and expand elements of that message for this weekend.

### **Preliminary Points**

1. If you are single, divorced or widowed, you may feel like this message on marriage doesn't apply to you and you may feel like checking out but let me encourage you not to. By listening to this message, you are showing your high regard and support for marriage. We live in a culture that dismisses marriage as an irrelevant relic of tradition. The spirit of our times has vigorously sought to dilute the sanctity of marriage through its condescending disregard, disrespect, and redefinition. As Christians, whether we are married, divorced, widowed or single, we must reclaim marriage as a gift from God.

The truth is that marriage has never found its worth or definition from any society or culture because ultimately marriage is a divine institution. Marriage between one man and one woman is the exclusive design of God's personal genius. It has withstood the test of time and will continue to endure as a living memorial of God's gracious provision for His creatures, created in His perfect wisdom and established by His infinite power to reflect Christ's love for the church. Hebrews 13:4 says, "***Let marriage be held in honor among all.***"

2. A good marriage is more than being with the right person; it's *being* the right person. One pastor writes: "*I think the biggest investment that a wife or a husband can make in their spouse is the investment they make in their own souls...so, at 73 I'm fighting for my marriage every day by fighting for my holiness.*"
3. Marriage is not 50/50 where you go halfway and then wait for your spouse to catch up. No. We're called to give 100% because as 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, "***Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***" Every marriage can get better when it's centered on Christ and when both spouses live out their God-given roles and responsibilities.
4. If you are in an abusive and dangerous relationship, please find a safe place and get some help.

### **Submit to One Another**

Please turn to Ephesians 5:21, which is where we ended last weekend: "***Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.***" It is unacceptable for anyone to exalt themselves as better than anyone else. This is similar to Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:3: "***Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility***

*count others more significant than yourselves.*” We are called to humbly submit to our spouses by focusing on their interests, concerns, and needs. This requires a servant attitude where we lay our rights and ambition aside.

I’ve mentioned this before, but a helpful metaphor of marriage is the image of cultivating a garden. A good gardener breaks up the ground and plants the seed. The gardener proactively cares for what has been planted by watering, fertilizing, weeding, and pruning in order to enjoy the harvest to come. If you want a good garden, it will take an enormous amount of work and constant attention.

Generally, good gardeners don’t skip a day in their garden so it doesn’t get away from them. They’re especially focused on pulling weeds so they don’t choke their precious plants. One author says, *“A master gardener is someone who carefully monitors the condition of a garden and judiciously acts to ensure it’s well being.”* Good gardens, like good marriages, don’t happen by accident. They take work.

Another author writes: *“Marriage is not like sod you buy and bring home and roll out and it’s ready to go. A lot of people enter marriage thinking since they found the right person everything’s going to be right. When couples start having conflict, it’s easy to think the problem is the particular person you’re married to.”* Actually, the problem is there are two sinners who are striving to become one.

Our culture teaches people to marry for happiness while the Bible says marriage reflects the glory of God and is a reenactment of the gospel. One pastor puts it like this: *“The purpose of marriage is to help your spouse become his or her future glory self through sacrificial service.”*

This is counter-cultural because most enter marriage with this mindset: *“I’ll be the spouse I ought to be if and to the degree you’re the spouse you ought to be.”* But if you’re in a gospel reenactment by helping your spouse become his or her future glory self through sacrificial service, you will say, *“I will be the spouse I ought to be whether you are being the spouse you ought to be or not, because Jesus gave me spousal love like that. He loved me not because I was lovely, but in order to make me lovely...and I’m going to do that for you.”* And all God’s people said...hmm.

In the marriage relationship, the husband has the privilege of portraying the headship of Christ over the church by his loving and sacrificial leadership. The wife’s privilege is to symbolically represent the church in its submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head. These divinely appointed marital roles serve as

symbols of the mysterious and beautiful relationship between Christ and His church.

Gardening roles differ for husbands and wives, but the principle of submissive humility is the same for both. We see how these different responsibilities are fleshed out in Ephesians 5:22-33.

***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”***

We could summarize the sermon in a sentence:

*If you want your marriage to matter, live out your role and responsibilities.*

### **The Wife’s Role**

Let’s make an obvious observation. Only 3 ½ verses are addressed to wives, while 8 ½ are written to husbands. This passage teaches that the wife has one primary responsibility and is found in verses 22-24: wives are to *submit* to their husbands, as to the Lord. Some of you may be tempted to tune out because this might sound like the ranting of an ancient male chauvinist. Let me remind you this is how God set it up. Here at Edgewood, we won’t step back from biblical truth and teaching, no matter how it sounds in our society and culture.

The word “submission” is explosive in our culture today because many equate it with oppression, subjugation, or dominance. On top of that, Kent Hughes points out this truth has *“been perverted and abused by disordered and sinful men.”*

This word is actually biblical and is a command, with the emphasis upon submitting to Christ.

- ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”*** (verse 22)
- ***“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*** (verse 24)

Husbands and wives are equal in value, but not identical in roles and responsibilities. We are designed to function in complementary ways.

The idea is this: *Being devoted to Christ, in a like manner, submit to your husbands.* The wife is to be subject to her husband not because he is such a wonderful creature, but because she has a previous and primary relationship with her Lord.

Submission to your husband is to be a reflection and outworking of your submission to Christ. Or to say it another way – a wife is to submit because of the Lordship of Christ and the headship of her husband. 1 Corinthians 11:3: ***“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”***

This is really the fulfillment of Genesis 2:20, where we read the first wife was created to be a ***“helper”*** for her husband. She is not to be in charge, but neither is she to be bossed around. Instead, she is to be a loyal helper who willingly submits to her husband out of reverence for Christ.

I like how one commentator explains submission: *“An inclination of the will to say ‘yes’ to the husband’s leadership and a disposition of spirit to support his initiatives.”* Wives, how are you doing on this? Are you striving to submit, or striving towards strife?

1 Peter 3:1 reinforces this truth: ***“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands...”*** To submit comes from an old military word meaning to voluntarily line up under for the sake of order. The primary idea is to give up one’s own rights. Here’s a helpful definition: *“To rank yourself under someone else in order to lift them up and build them up.”* It’s an attitude of cooperation because marriage moves into chaos so quickly. It does not imply inferiority but a willingness to line up under the husband’s leadership. It’s also a command in the present tense, meaning it’s something that must become a continual practice.

Notice, wives are not called to submit to someone else's husband. Let's be clear this does not mean husbands are better than wives. It's a matter of roles in the relationship. Husbands and wives are equal before God but they are not identical.

The key to developing a spirit of submission is to first be surrendered and submitted to the Lord. To say it another way: You will not be able to submit to anyone unless you have first surrendered to the Savior as Colossians 3:18 says: ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”***

Submission will always be a struggle because the tension goes back to Genesis 3:16 where we read in the New Living Translation: ***“And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”***

*If you want your marriage to matter, live out your role and responsibilities.*

### **The Husband's Role**

Now, it's the husband's turn. If wives are to reflect the submission of the church to Christ, what would you expect Paul to command husbands to do? I would have thought he'd say something like this: Husbands are to manifest the headship of Jesus Christ over His church, and thus they are to be the spiritual leaders of their wives. If wives are commanded to submit, then the husbands surely must be instructed to lead. But they are not.

Instead of commanding a husband to *lead* his wife, Paul instructs a man to *love* his wife as Christ loves the church. Only as you love your wife, can you provide servant leadership for her.

Paul's main point is obvious – he repeats the command for husbands to love their wives three times in this passage. He knows husbands are not the best listeners so he wants to make sure we get the message! Here's the best definition I've found on what this kind of love looks like: *“Love that acts for the best good and promotes the well-being of the other person, demanding nothing in return.”* This kind of love gives freely, sacrificially and unconditionally...regardless whether it's reciprocated.

I like how one pastor puts it: *“Christ-like, humble, loving, sacrificial men are to take primary responsibility for leadership, provision and protection. And women are called to come alongside these men, support that leadership, and advance the*

*kingdom of Christ with the full range of her gifts in the paths laid out in Scripture.”*

I see five ways a husband is to love his wife from this passage.

**1. With sacrificing love.** Listen to Ephesians 5:25: ***“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*** The word “*as*” reveals my model in marriage is the sacrificial love of Christ which was demonstrated in how He ***“gave Himself up”*** on the cross ***“for”*** us. Jesus died as the final substitutionary sacrifice. A husband must take his cue from Christ – it’s not about rights and power, but about relationship and sacrifice.

Two other passages come to mind which help husbands see what sacrificial love is *not* like.

- **Husbands are not to be harsh.** Colossians 3:19: ***“Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”***
- **Husbands are not to be haughty.** 1 Peter 3:7: ***“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...”***

Kent Hughes says the force of these words is staggering: *“There is no honest Christian husband who can hear or read these words and not feel the gut punch.”* Husbands, when is the last time you sacrificed something for your wife? When did you give up or give in? Are you willing to die for her? Better yet, in what ways are you living for your bride right now?

**2. With sanctifying love.** We see this in verses 26-27: ***“That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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.”*** The word “*sanctify*” means, *“to set apart and be holy.”* The word “*cleansed*” is the idea of *“freeing from filth.”* Here’s a literal translation of verse 27: *“That He might Himself present unto Himself the church glorious.”*

Just as Jesus will present us in splendor, without spot or stain, so husbands are to help their wives pursue holiness. Fellow husbands, God calls us to love and to lay down our lives so that our wives grow in godliness. In short, a husband’s love is designed to bless and benefit his wife.

One of our key roles is to help our wives reach maturity in Christ, building them up every chance we get. It involves relating to your wife as a sister in Christ, not just as your mate. Husbands, how are you doing in this regard? Is your wife more like Christ because she is married to you? Or, is she more like Christ in spite of you?

**3. With satisfying love. 5:28-31: “*In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.*”** Just as we feed and care for our own bodies – well, most of the time – we are called not only to provide a positive spiritual environment but also to care for our wives physically and emotionally as well.

The word “*nourishes*” focuses on internal provision and means, “*to bring to maturity.*” A godly husband helps his wife reach her full potential in Christ. The word “*cherishes*” means, “*to soften with heat and has the idea of external protection through tender care, concern and comfort.*” I’m called to feed Beth’s soul enabling her to grow in godliness and I’m to fertilize the soil of her garden to produce a good harvest.

The word “*husband*” comes from “*husbandman*,” which originally meant, “*one who tills the soil*” and keeps the weeds out. We need to be planting seeds of security, using the fertilizer of faithfulness and watching to make sure weeds are not allowed to choke out what is growing. Later it came to mean one who holds the house together, like a manager who spends his time and resources wisely.

As husbands, our responsibility is to love our wives by holding things together in the home and providing an environment for growth and fruitfulness. One pastor put it like this: “*If your garden is full of weeds, don’t curse the soil. Take a look at your own soul and get back to work pulling weeds.*”

I appreciate the emphasis of our BetterMan group, led by Nino Saldivar, which meets on Thursday nights. Men, if you’re not in a group with other men, a new session will begin on April 25<sup>th</sup>:

- God’s man courageously follow God’s Word.
- God’s man loves and protects God’s woman.
- God’s man excels at the work God has given him.
- God’s man betters God’s world through his children, church, and community.

**4. With separating love.** A husband is not inherently better than his spouse. We see this in Ephesians 5:31, which is actually a quote from Genesis 2:24 and repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19:5: ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*** We’re equal in spiritual footing and eternal importance because we are partners who become one flesh. Whatever each does to the other, he does to himself or herself. Husbands, we’re called to leave our parents, cleave to our wife, and allow the Lord to weave us into one.

Christian husbands and wives are ***“heirs together of the grace of life.”*** We are sharers together in salvation. Romans 8:17 calls us ***“fellow heirs with Christ.”*** Malachi 2:14 says, ***“...though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”***

Some time ago I listened to a sermon which described distortions of God’s order. Guys, which column most describes you?

Tyrannical	Timid
Abusive	Passive
Rabid Dog	Scared Puppy
Hurts	Hides
Heartless	Spineless
Attacks	Abandons
Hovers Over	Hides Under
Brute	Baby
Scary	Scared
Indignant	Indifferent

Husbands are called to be loving leaders. I’m to be bold and yet broken, caring but not a coward. In short, Beth needs me to be a tender warrior as I lovingly lead her and our family.

I like how one pastor defines headship: ***“The divine calling of a husband to take the primary responsibility for Christ-like servant leadership, protection and provision in the home.”***

Often I tell guys when they ask for dating advice to remember their girlfriend is first and foremost their sister in Christ. The same applies to marriage. Fellow

husbands, because your wife is your sister in Christ, pray for her, love her, encourage her, and serve with her.

**5. With symbolizing love.** When God brings a man and woman together in marriage, they are to be a reflection of the mysterious relationship between Jesus as groom and the church as His bride. We see this in verse 32: ***“This mystery is profound, and I am saying it refers to Christ and the church.”*** The word ***“mystery”*** refers to a symbolic secret and ***“profound”*** means *“great in size and stature.”* It’s the Greek word *meGas*, meaning in God’s eyes marriage is mega big! God has a very high view of matrimony.

One commentator translates it like this: *“This mystery is a great one.”* When both husbands and wives fulfill their roles and responsibilities in marriage, their relationship symbolizes the sweet love of Christ and the submission of His church to His leadership.

*If you want your marriage to matter, live out your role and responsibilities.*

### **Love and Respect**

Verse 33 gives us a concise summary of the entire passage in a very personalized way. There’s not a more definitive statement of God’s mandate for marriage than this: ***“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”*** J.B. Philips paraphrases it this way: *“In practice what I have said amounts to this...”* The word ***“however”*** can be translated as, *“nevertheless, over and above.”* If you don’t remember anything else, remember this. J. Vernon McGee says this brings the *“romantic into the realm of reality.”*

The word ***“let”*** indicates this is a command and ***“each one of you”*** shows it applies to everyone who is married. The tense indicates these are present imperatives, meaning these commands are to be continuously followed.

I’m thankful Paul gives us such a concise summary. If you’re a husband, you *must* love your wife. If you’re a wife, you *must* respect your husband.

**1. Husbands are to love their wives.** A husband is to love unconditionally and sacrificially, putting his wife’s needs before his own. He is never to flirt with another, leave, cheat, beat or belittle his bride. He is to be attentive and affectionate and meet her need for security.

**2. Wives are to respect their husbands.** Wives are to reinforce and meet a husband's need for significance by noticing him, valuing him, and esteeming him. Make sure you celebrate what he does well by speaking well of him.

Emerson Eggerichs frames the question like this when a couple is having conflict: *"What's the issue when the issue isn't the issue?"* The real issue is often the wife is not being loved and the husband is not being respected. He cites research showing that when husbands and wives are in conflict, 83% of the men feel disrespected and 70% of women feel unloved.

Here are some quotes from his very helpful book, *Love and Respect*.

- *Wives are made to love, want to love, and expect love. Husbands are made to be respected, want respect, and expect respect.*
- *When a husband feels disrespected, it is especially hard to love his wife. When a wife feels unloved, it is especially hard to respect her husband.*
- *Without love from him, she reacts without respect toward him; without respect from her, he reacts without love toward her.*
- *If a wife talks down to her husband and disrespects him, she cuts him down at his place of greatest need. In the same way, when a husband doesn't love his wife sacrificially, he cuts her down at her place of greatest need.*

And this leads to what he calls, "The crazy cycle."

*"The Crazy Cycle triggers and fuels itself. When a wife feels unloved, she tends to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband. When a husband feels disrespected, he tends to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. And around and around they go on the Crazy Cycle. Without love, she reacts; without respect, he reacts."*

The way to stop the crazy cycle is for *one spouse* to make the first move and begin living out his or her responsibility. Eggerichs refers to this as the "Energizing Cycle." We can't say, *"When he starts loving me, then I'll respect him."* Nor can we say, *"When she starts respecting me, I'll begin loving her."* Somebody told me this a long time ago, and it fits here: *my response is always my responsibility.* I must focus on what I must do, regardless of how my spouse is fulfilling his or her role.

### **Action Steps**

Let's ponder one of the quotes from the beginning of the message: *"I think the biggest investment that a wife or a husband can make in their spouse is the investment they make in their own souls...so, at 73 I'm fighting for my marriage every day by fighting for my holiness."* Here are some ways to fight for your holiness.

1. Women, attend the Women's Luncheon on May 4, get involved in a women's Bible study, a book study, or in intentional discipleship.
2. Men, plug into one of our four weekly Bible studies – Sunday morning, Wednesday night, Thursday morning, or Thursday night.
3. Instead of fighting against each other, start fighting for your marriage.
4. Stop asking God to fix your spouse and ask Him to fix you.
5. Choose to believe the best about your spouse.
6. Get some help if you need it.
7. Obey with actions even if you don't feel like it. Here's a paraphrase of one of C.S. Lewis' quotes: *"Do not waste time bothering whether you feel love for your spouse; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."*
8. Husbands, get in the habit of saying, *"I love you"* to your wife and show that you do every day, whether she shows respect to you or not. This will help her know she's secure in your love.
9. Wives, get in the habit of saying, *"I respect you"* to your husband and show that you do every day, whether he demonstrates love to you or not. This will help him know you see him as significant.
10. Practice saying "Please forgive me" and "I forgive you" because you're going to need it.

### **The Ultimate Marriage Builder**

Wives, as daughters of Eve, your natural desire will be to push back against your husband's leadership. Husbands, as sons of Adam, your natural desire will be to dominate or abdicate.

This section of Scripture, with its high view of marriage, follows immediately after Paul's teaching about being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18: ***"But, be filled with the Spirit."*** Only as the Holy Spirit controls our life, can we have the will and the ability to obey His commands. The filling of the Holy Spirit leads to a garden filled with the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit***

*is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

It's not surprising the titles “Lord,” “Christ,” and “Savior” are mentioned in some fashion 14 times in this passage! Psalm 127:1 says, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”*

If we go ahead one chapter, we see we are called to put on our spiritual armor and stand against the evil one because Satan hates what God creates. If you want a marriage that matters...

- Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Suit up spiritually and fight against unholy spiritual forces attacking your marriage.

Adam had to give part of himself in order to get a bride, but Christ gave all of Himself to purchase His bride at the cross. God opened Adam's side, but sinful people pierced the second Adam's side.

If you don't know Christ through the new birth, you need to get saved today. There's no way you can have a marriage of oneness without knowing the One who died in your place, as your sin substitute. If you have never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, it's time to do that right now.

You could pray this prayer with me.

*Jesus, I realize I'm a selfish sinner. I repent of how I've been living and want to go in Your direction. Thank You for dying in my place on the cross as my substitute and for rising from the dead on the third day. I believe and now I receive You into my life. As my Lord, enable me to follow Your ways in my marriage or in my singleness. If there's anything that needs to change in my life, please change it so I can reflect You to the world around me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

## **New Member**

Shirley Meade (Saturday at 5)