

Ephesians 5:21-31 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

The Picture of a perfect marriage

1. Christ's love for the Church
2. Husbands, love your wives
3. Wives, submit to your husbands

"And they lived happily ever after." This classic ending to so many fairy tales was based on one very big presumption. The happy livers were almost always the gallant prince and his bride. Why were they now living happily? Because they were together forever. So, this classic ending presumes that marriage brings complete and eternal happiness. Is that true? Most of us would agree that marriage isn't the automatic escalator to happiness that it is often pictured to be. On the other hand, marriage doesn't have to be an end of happiness either. God instituted marriage for the good of society and as a blessing for us. But for marriage to be the blessing God intends it to be, we need to follow God's Word and we need to begin right where Paul begins: *out of reverence for Christ*.

As we have been looking at the pictures which Paul's letter presents to us, today we open the photo album to look at our wedding picture. As we look at this picture, we see the picture of the perfect marriage.

This picture begins with Christ's love for the Church. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. Many say – correctly – that money and lack of communication are the two main causes of divorce today. But we can go a little deeper. The real cause of divorce is selfishness. Why is money a problem in our marriage? Because we are selfish. Why are you not happy with your spouse? Most of the time, it's because you are selfish. You want the happiness that you think you deserve and your spouse is not delivering. The problem is our own sinful selfishness. That sinful selfishness not only tears apart marriages and harms families. It also condemns us to hell.

But what did Christ do? He loved the Church and gave himself up for her. He died on the cross for us. He went through hell for us. He loved us with a goal in mind. *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word*. He took us filthy, dead corpses and washed us in the water and word of baptism. By this cleansing he made us alive and holy.

When we go to my parents, they like to feed us well. They like to give us t-bone steaks on Saturday nights and they always give me the biggest one. And since I don't like mine well-done like they do, my mom will set my steak aside from the others and say, "This one's for Kenny." That's what holy means. Not that it is for Kenny, but holy means something set apart for God. Through baptism, Jesus has set us apart from the unbelieving world and made us God's own people. Even though we were once an abomination to God, now we are holy to him, clean and pure.

How can that be? *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*. It all goes back to Christ. He became the death, the curse, the sin that we were. And he gives us what he was. As Paul said in another place, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus' blood puts the cleansing in baptism. Jesus' blood is the detergent that pulls all the grime of sin off of us and puts it on Jesus. Cleansed in that washing of baptism we shine with the glory of holiness.

We are Christ's beautiful bride, *a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*. In Christ and his bride, the Church, we have a picture of a perfect marriage. That is the picture that Paul wants us to emulate in our marriages.

So, he says, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.* “Love is more than just buying flowers or planning romantic getaways. Being in love, with the kind of love Christ shows, is a commitment to giving one’s all. It’s love that works long, hard hours on the job and at home for your wife. It’s love that considers giving up a chosen career or a favorite hobby, if that’s what it will take to improve your marriage. A husband shows Christ’s love when he swallows his pride and apologizes without making excuses. This love forgives all and refuses to bring up past wrongs.” (Meditations Vol. 47, #4, p. 66)

The basis for everything Paul writes here is given in the last verse of this text where Paul quotes God’s institution of marriage in Genesis 2: “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*” When God established marriage in the garden of Eden, he meant that marriage made two people one. In other words, when people enter into marriage they are no longer two separate individuals. They give up their individuality to become a united whole. That oneness is at the core of marriage. It is the commitment of both husband and wife to the oneness of marriage that bonds them for life.

We may think that giving up our individuality makes us less of a person. It does not make us less, but more. God has given me two legs. If I only had one leg, I couldn’t walk. One leg by itself isn’t complete. Likewise, God has given me two eyes and yet I see one image. Two eyes complement each other. That’s what God intended for marriage: the two become one.

So, when a husband loves like Christ loved the Church, he is simply loving himself. *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹*After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.* Loving your wife as Christ loved the Church is simply what’s best for you.

So, listen to your wife. Take her opinion into account. Serve her as Christ served the Church. But our service as husbands is as head of the household. That buck stops with us. It’s our job to make the tough decisions about what would be best and make our wives and families happiest. It’s our responsibility to keep our families in God’s Word.

And wives? *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* Submit does not imply inferiority or lower class. It’s a word used in Roman armies to set an arrangement for battle. It’s the idea of putting things in order. The best illustration of submitting is in baseball. A pitcher and catcher need to work together and be on the same page in order to get a batter out. The catcher leads by calling the pitch. The pitcher submits to the catcher and throws what the catcher called. Sometimes, the pitcher will shake off a pitch. There may be the occasional visit to the mound to get on the same page, but most of the time, the pitcher submits to the catcher. That doesn’t mean the pitcher is less important, less needed, less of a person. It’s the teamwork of working together for a common goal.

That’s how God established marriage. *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.* ²⁴*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* Would you ever consider it a burden or something horrible submitting to Jesus? Well, I hope not. That’s how God wants you to submit to your husband as the head of the family. True, it’s easier to submit to our perfect, loving Savior God, than it is to submit to that man that doesn’t listen, that man that keeps you awake at night with all that noise coming out of his nasal passages, that man you can’t ever talk to because he is asleep by 9:00 in his recliner.

He doesn’t deserve your love or your submission, but we go back to where we started. You do it not because he deserves it, but *out of reverence for Christ.*

“And they lived happily ever after.” That’s a classic ending to many fairy tales, but that’s why they are fairy tales. They are not reality. In this sinful world marriage doesn’t end in happily ever after. Only in Christ is there a happy ending. Because Christ loved us and gave himself for us; because Christ suffered and died for us; because Christ washed us in the waters of baptism, we live happily ever after for all eternity. May that love inspire you in your marriage and may the picture of the perfect marriage that Paul has given us here, be reflected in your live, to the glory of Jesus.