

Christian Marriage Principles, part 2 of Straying From the Truth
June 24, 2018

I started this occasional series earlier this month. This series will pop up from time to time as God leads. It concerns things that some Christians get wrong. I am not speaking of first or second tier doctrines like salvation or baptism. They don't get the gospel of salvation wrong. But they get something else wrong, something taught in the Bible, but misunderstood by some Christians. So it is not denominational differences that is the subject of these sermons.

The first sermon dealt with miraculous healing. While God can and sometimes does heal people supernaturally, He does not promise to do so. But some Christians mistakenly teach that God does.

This morning, we're looking at Christian marriage and some misunderstandings about what God expects. Now I know, some of you are not married yet. Some of you do not expect to ever be married or married again. But we all need to know the truth of Christian marriage so we can teach it correctly when we encounter those who teach it incorrectly. And you who might get married some day need to know what kind of marriage you should seek to have.

Marriage is a difficult subject to discuss because it is both a religious institution and a secular one. Governments have a hand in setting up laws about marriage. And culture has a hand in describing what a marriage should be like. There is conflict in America between what government, culture, and the Christian faith expect marriage to be. If you and your spouse decide to live out a New Testament view of marriage, you may get push back from non-Christian family and friends.

But let me encourage you to pursue God's plan for marriage anyway. You will find it to be the most rewarding kind of marriage to have.

We believe that God is good and that everything God does is for His glory and our good. And part of what God has given to accomplish both is marriage. Marriage was invented by God. It is a God-given relationship between people that reflects the church's relationship to Jesus. This is part of what Paul points to in Ephesians 5, as we will read in a few moments.

As we begin, you need to know that God wants us to have the best marriages. God wants Christians to have the most satisfying marriages for both husband and wife. God wants Christian husbands to be the kind of husbands that their wives brag on to other women. God wants Christian wives to be the kind of wives that their husbands brag on to other men. When others are complaining about their husbands, Christian wives can brag that their husbands are nothing like the typical, joked about husband. This will make Christian marriage attractive to non-believers. It will draw them also to Jesus.

Remember this series is about misunderstandings of Christian teachings by some Christians. There is much that is misunderstood by many concerning today's passage. Don't push back until you get a clearer picture of what God wants for us. Your understanding has been shaped by voices other than the Bible.

Ephesians 5:22-24 (NIV) Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Mistake #1 - Submission is not slavery.

Some of you might be thinking what culture has been pushing, that submission is slavery. In the minds of many people in our culture today, submission is equal to slavery, mistreatment, and abuse. And if that were true, God would not have commanded wives to submit to their husbands. There is no warrant in the Bible for one person to abuse another. The exact opposite is true. God looks out for all, even the poor, the orphan, the widow, the foreigner, the abused. As small as one person and as large as a country, God sees how one treats another. God will punish all abusers.

When God tells wives to submit to their husbands, this parallels the relationship between Jesus and his church. As the church submits to Christ, so wives are to submit to their husbands. So how does the church submit to Christ? The church looks to Jesus to lead us as His church.

We don't look to Jesus to make every decision. The Fellowship Committee, though we pray for wisdom, don't wait for Jesus to plan the fellowships, to decide which foods to have, etc. The Properties Committee seeks Jesus to lead, but many decisions are made about repairs and equipment. The Youth Activities Committee prays for Jesus to lead and give us wisdom. But we make choices about what activities to do and when. The pastor prays for direction from Jesus about what to preach, but does not always sense that a particular sermon was planned by Jesus. He preaches anyway.

We look to Jesus to lead us in being the kind of church He wants us to be. He directs the major aspects of this church. We ask for direction. We ask Him to provide the people, resources, etc. that we need. We look to Jesus to lead his church. So wives are to look to their husbands to lead the marriage, the family.

Obedying this command is going to be hard for Christian women to fulfill. It is going to be hard for several reasons. First, it is hard because of misunderstanding submission to mean slavery. But submission is not slavery. God is not calling for Christian women to be slaves of their husbands, fulfilling his slightest wish or whim, even to do something sinful.

Instead, submission is a voluntary choice to look to the husband to lead the marriage and family. John Piper defines it this way.

"Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts." -- John Piper

A second reason it will be hard for a wife to submit is it goes against what is natural for her. Her natural inclination is to be the captain of her life, making her own choices for self and others. This is sin. Your sinful self does not want to submit to anyone, not God, not a human authority, and not a husband. Going against this natural tendency will be hard.

Third, it will be hard because it is counter to what our culture is teaching women today. You may face criticism for living out submission to your husband.

But remember, if this works out as God has planned it, your marriage will be exceedingly happy. You will be most satisfied with your marriage. You will be thanking God for the husband you have. It may not seem like it yet, but there is more to understand.

Now let's see what God says to the husband.

Ephesians 5:25-29 (NIV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church...

Note that husbands are commanded to love their wives. This is not a sexual love he is speaking of. It is not even a friendship love. It is self-sacrificing love. This is agape love. This is the kind of love Jesus has shown to us. This is a serving love. Jesus served us by meeting our need for a Savior.

Jesus died for us, sacrificing his life in a horrible death to provide us with salvation. And now, as the risen Lord, Jesus directs the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus is loving us with a sanctifying love. He is working for our good, to help us become holy and pure, devoted to living out God's plans.

Jesus prays for us, plans for us, encourages us, helps us, and teaches us. He always wants what is best for us and is ready to do whatever will help us be all that God plans for us to be.

This is how husbands are to love their wives. You are to help your wife live a life devoted to God.

And this is no easy task. The wife will have a difficult time submitting to the husband. The husband will have a difficult time loving the wife as Jesus loves. It will be difficult because it requires so much self-sacrifice on your part, constantly thinking of her good and how to help her want to obey God.

Jesus works for the holiness of the church. The husband is to be working for the holiness of his wife, that she will devote herself fully to Jesus.

Mistake #2 - Men fail to understand that God wants them to be the kind of husband that the wife will gladly submit to.

Note that says "gladly," not just willingly. Men, your wives should be so delighted at how you love her, that she will gladly submit to your leadership.

Mistake #3 - Christian men are not commanded to make their wives submit.

Many men fail to understand these verses aright. Men fail to read verses 22-24 correctly. Let me illustrate. In Mark 10, Jesus is speaking to a man who says he wants eternal life. After a bit of background on how he has tried to achieve this Jesus tells him there is only a bit more to do.

Mark 10:21 (NIV) Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Now, this command to sell everything he has is not a command to all those who want eternal life. It was just a command for that one man. Jesus knew what was in his heart and that he loved his money more than he wanted eternal life.

Example two, in John 13, Jesus is eating with his disciples. Judas is planning to betray Jesus this night. Jesus knows this and at one point in the meal says to Judas.

John 13:27 (NIV) "What you are about to do, do quickly,"

This command is just to Judas, for that moment, not a command for us all to obey. It was just for Judas. It applied to no one else. And no one else was involved.

And look at a third example. In John 21 Jesus tells Peter three times to feed His sheep. Peter looks behind him and sees John standing there and says to Jesus, "What about him?" Jesus tells Peter that what happens to John is Jesus' concern, not Peter's concern. In-other-words, Jesus is telling Peter to feed his sheep, not all of us.

The point is that not every command in the New Testament is a command to all Christian. The command in Ephesians 5:22-24 is addressed to Christian wives. It is not a command to Christian husbands.

Men, scratch out these verses from your Bible. As far as you are concerned they don't exist. There is no command for you here. It is not addressed to you. You are talked about, but not talked to by the Lord.

There is no command for men to argue their wives into submission, hit their wives into submission, or use any other form of coercion or abuse to get your own way.

A husband and father who leads his family by intimidation or abuse has NO biblical support. None. God doesn't want you to be head of the marriage and home like the world of the first century. You are not to be head of your family as a boss, a general, a judge, a policeman, or a CEO. God's way is different.

And no woman is expected by God to submit to abuse. Abuse is sin and we are not to submit to the sins of others, no matter who they are.

Husbands, you are to relate to your wife as Jesus does to His church. Jesus does not force us to submit. Though Jesus is Lord of all the earth, he does not force his will upon us. Instead, he is patient with us. As Lord of the universe and head of the church He could forcibly move us to obey Him, but he does not. Our obedience is always voluntary.

The wife's submission to her husband is between her and Jesus. The husband has no right to demand the wife submit to him.

Men, God wants you to be the kind of husband that the wife will gladly submit to. Look at her as your partner, seeking her counsel in matters important to the family. Seek her health, her well-being, her emotional and spiritual best.

So we see that God has designed marriage to require more work than most worldly marriages, but also to end up happier than most worldly marriages.

The wife is not inferior to the husband, any more than women are inferior to men. Both are made in God's image. Both are given free will and responsibilities.

Men, if you want your marriage to be as happy and satisfying as God intends, then you need to be worthy of submission. Your wife must see a man who loves her so much that he is willing to lay his life down on the line for her. Many men would do that in a hostage scenario. But Jesus is calling us to do it daily, in the nitty-gritty of living together as a couple.

This is not an easy thing to do. It is hard work. It is sacrificial work. But the result will be worth whatever it costs you.

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Invitation

God's plan is always best. God's plan will always result in His glory and our good. You won't be disappointed if you seek God's will.

And God's will is for your salvation. You are a sinner and need saving. Let Jesus save you today.