

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: A woman accompanied her husband to the doctor's office. After the examination, the doctor took the wife aside. He was very serious and she braced herself. "Your husband is a very weak man right now," he said. "He has a rare and deadly kind of anemia and he is going to need some special attention or he won't live. Every day, without fail, he needs big, well-balanced meals. Everything has to be fresh. And he needs lots of rest, so don't let him do household chores—no vacuuming, dishes, home repair... nothing. And you have to keep the house spotless so he is not exposed to any unnecessary germs. You've got to keep it very, very clean. Is that clear?"

She nodded solemnly and walked out to meet her husband. He looked at her anxiously. "It's bad isn't it?" he groaned. "What did he say?"

A tear trailed down her cheek as the wife said to him, "You're gonna die!"

- B. There's a limit when it comes to marriage, isn't there? Today, we're going to look at a passage in **Ephesians 5** on marriage that has a tendency to make everyone nervous. To help me, I've invited our friend, Raymond Wunderlich, to share this time with me. Raymond is a licensed Christian counselor. He and his wife Pam lead a Christian counseling ministry called **Whitestone Counseling Resources**. Raymond has studied this passage closely, and has spent hundreds of hours visiting with husbands and wives about marriage, so he brings a unique perspective to this subject. We're going to sort of preach this in tandem, in dialogue.
- C. Last week we looked at this whole section of Eph 5-6, beginning in v.21, "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." All the instructions that follow—to wives and husbands, children and parents, workers and bosses—all have to do with submission in various forms. I shared with you that Christian submission is unique in that it comes from being filled with God's Spirit, it is really submission to Christ, and it is submission carried with love. Now today we want to take that into the realm of marriage. There are two very straightforward commands to wives and husbands. But they raise lots of questions.

I. **"WIVES, SUBMIT TO YOUR HUSBANDS AS TO THE LORD" (5:22-24)**

This is a "No Elbow Zone"

- A. Raymond, that command needs some **guard rails** beside it because it's been misused. What are they?
- This is not cause-and-effect, but *reciprocal causation*.
  - This is a command of God.
  - This is a personal, willful & intentional choice to position myself as a servant to my spouse.
  - What does "being subject to" mean – loyalty of devotion
- B. The problem, as I said last week, is that no wife here is married to a husband as good, smart or loving as Jesus. Yet she is to submit to him as she would to Christ. The Bible here isn't saying you have as good a reason for submitting to your husband as you do to Jesus. It is saying that the nature of your submission to your husband is akin to our submission as Christians to Christ. Think what submitting to Christ looks like, and be like that with your husband.
- Raymond, how do you help Christian wives think through this subject? (Refer to "respect" v.33; 1 Pet. 3)
- Having a mindset of giving out of myself to my husband while honoring my Lord; putting energy to how I honor God; not energy to try to get my husband to change or to "get it". Not your job to make your spouse "get it"
  - Not let her powerless feelings drive her actions.
- C. When we submit to Christ it is always an act of love and trust. He never forces us, but rather wants us to respond because we **love** him. But he also does not always explain to us why things are happening, or why his command will be best, and we have to **trust** him. Submission is an act of love and trust.
- Illus.: Imagine you're working in an office for someone whom you really look up to—someone who is

wise and creative and kind. A challenge arises and you go into your boss's office and say, "What do you think we should do with this? You're in charge, so how can I help? I have some ideas, but it is up to you." Doing that in a respectful and loving way would bring out the best in both the boss and the employee. So it is in marriage.

- D. Raymond, so what if the husband doesn't respond well? For example, let's say a couple is shopping for a new sofa. They've got a budget and a color scheme in mind, but then the guy sees this big leather beauty that he's got to have—even though it is way over budget and she thinks it would look terrible in their living room. But he's made up his mind. He's got to have that couch. What should she do?
- She can ask why this means so much to him
  - Meet him where he is in his desires, so he feels listened to and understood.
  - Ask him how he sees it fitting in the living room?
  - "I want this to be an "our" room, so can we see if we can find a sofa we both like?"
- E. Why do you think God wants things to work this way?
- Because this is about *relationship*! Discuss dynamics of relationships. Heightens the experience of oneness; over time this will smooth out.

What does it do for the wife?

- She learns the true benefit of willful submission; she learns how to listen & understand, and truly value her husband. Gets to know him, and learns how God blesses their marriage in the long run through her efforts of gentleness, kindness, & "chaste & respectful behaviors."
- [Lee:] One thing that occurs to me is that with the strong relationship sense women often have, a wife can play to **her natural relational strength** because that's what a OneDown person needs in order to be influential in a relationship. Comment? In our culture women almost have a built-in emotional intelligence. By sharing their emotional experiences she can lead her husband into deeper emotional intimacy over time.
- Lee: develops her capacity to trust God, even if the husband isn't changing.
- The key is that I'm not carrying out my role to get my partner to change, but to simply obey Christ. This is love, not manipulation.

Alright, let's talk about husbands. The Bible says in v.25...

## II. "HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, JUST AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER, TO MAKE HER HOLY..." (5:25-33)

Husbands, you have more verses than the wife!

- A. I suppose most people who think seriously about loving someone else realize that there is a certain element of self-sacrifice involved, but the love of a Christian husband for his wife is ramped up from that in at least two ways:
- This is self-sacrifice to the max. "Gave himself up for her." This is self-sacrifice with dying in it. Raymond, what kind of dying would this involve for a Christian husband?
    - Making my wife's well-being and the well-being of our marital relationship second only to the priority of my relationship with God in my life. 1, 1A, 1B;
    - Guys say, "So you just want me to be a doormat!" No, this is giving out of yourself.
    - It is what Jesus asks us to do
    - "But what about my needs?" That's important, but if you make your needs first, the message Satan will send to her is that she's not important.
  - The second unique thing about Christ-like love is its purpose: "to make her holy." You know the expression, "If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!" But the Christian husband's goal is not so much to make momma *happy*, as *holy*. Notice here that Jesus makes his church holy by "cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." Raymond, how does that work in the husband-

wife relationship? How do you talk to Christian husbands about their role in helping their wives grow in holiness?

- I initially talk to them about Jesus' love for the husband, and how does he (Jesus) do his work in growing us into holiness? Is he always point out my faults? No! he loves us just as we are, and we are to love our wife just as she is. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts and rebukes; not the husband.
- Look for what is good, and tell her. Work to understand what is going on inside of her. **Become a student of your wife.** Etc. I'm getting out of God's way. When she feels loved even undeservedly it makes her look at herself and gives God room to work.

B. In v.26, the Bible tells husbands to *"love your wives just as Christ loved the church."* Then in v.28 he repeats himself but with a change: *"husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."* How does a husband love his wife as he loves his own body?

- Core needs of men (appreciation and value; a sense of accomplishment) and women (relational security, a sense that I'm #1 in his life).
- So, something like Jesus, a Christian husband wants to make a significant difference in his world, but we're made so that the husband needs a "suitable helper," just as Adam did in the beginning when God gave him a job to do.
- So a Christian husband has two tasks before him. One is to do work that God has given him and accomplish it successfully. Two, is to care for his wife, because he's can't accomplish all that God really calls him to do without her. He doesn't just need her encouragement and support. He needs *her*—all that God made her to be.
- Raymond: this goes to significance; how significant we are to each other; how significant we are in the body of Christ. So many wives do not feel significant. So many husbands feel alone in their sense of mission.
- A husband needs to **value this gift** God has given him in his wife to be all he needs to be to do all God has called him to do.
- The wife must look at her husband and say "He is God's gift to me to carry out all God's called me to be and do."

Raymond, how is a woman uniquely created to be a "suitable helper" for her husband?

- A woman is just more relationally attuned. The experience events at a different level than men. How brain chemistry works. It takes a woman longer to process an experience, because they think about a lot more factors than a man does. Men are often quicker to a decision, but maybe do not think through all the aspects. Sometimes, a man's more focused approach is really valuable.
- A woman comes alongside, and underneath. Husband and wife are helping each other to become more holy and more one.
- All this is getting **in step** with God. Brings out the fruit of the Spirit; it's all edifying.

C. So Raymond, just as wives sometimes have to deal with husbands who make submission really hard, what should a husband do whose wife really isn't very submissive? So, for example, he says to her over supper some evening, *"Honey, I've been thinking that it would be really good for our spiritual growth as Christians if we brought our giving up to a tithe, even though it will mean some cutbacks at home."* And she doesn't want anything to do with that. Now what does he do?

- Very similar to earlier example. He listens and meets her where she is, to gain understanding. Why she has difficulty with this. What in her background makes her feel this way? He earns the right to ask if he can share his thoughts and perspectives. Try to reach a mutual 'yes.' Relationship is the important thing; not winning.

How about if a husband sees that something is really hindering his wife's spiritual growth; say she is terribly anxious about the kids' health. What can he do?

- Ask if he can talk to you about this area? Is it ok if I inquire? As she talks, reaffirm his unconditional love and concern.
- To offer his help in whatever way she wants him to help. Respect what she asks for.
- Henry Cloud: three elements for lasting healthy change: 1) truth, 2) grace, and 3) time.

## Conclusion

Before we wrap up, how about some homework assignments? What have you found are especially good things a wife or husband can read if they want to strengthen their marriage?

- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman, *Intimate Allies*
- Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*
- Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*
- Gary Thomas, *Sacred Influence*
- Gary Thomas, *The Beautiful Fight*
- Gordon MacDonald, *When Men Think Private Thoughts*
- Doug Rosenau, *Celebration of Sex*
- Tim Alan Gardner and Scott M. Stanley, *Sacred Sex: A Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*

One last question. It is easy to imagine either a husband or wife trying to think through these commands for their own marriage and saying, "I just don't think I can do this? I can see how it is good and right, but I'm just not strong enough; I'm just not that loving?" What can you say to them?

- This is about *Christian* marriage; different than unbelievers. Set apart from the world.
- Power of the Holy Spirit, and we must yield to him.
- A marriage-long process; takes time.