

Marital harmony Ephesians 5:21-24

Proposition: God wants spouses to serve each other with agape (sacrificial type love) whether they deserve it or not.

Fewer and fewer people are choosing to get married today. They cite that around 40% of marriages break up in NZ so why bother. What people don't realise, however, is that people who live together unmarried are sinning and I would suggest from my observations at least four times more likely to break up than those who are married.

However, I would suggest that even for us Christians, who have a high view of marriage, that we would all acknowledge that marriage is hard work and we need all the help we can get.

As we head into what is often the most intensive and pressured time of the year for many families, I want to suggest that to have a Godly desire to serve our spouses this Christmas break is such a good intention.

As part of our study on the book of Ephesians our last passage for the year looks at this topic.

Paul has been teaching us about walking in unity and walking in purity and now we begin the next section.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9 Walking in harmony in our marriages.

Walking in harmony in our homes.

Walking in harmony at the job site.

Our passage this morning deals with the first section. How to walk in harmony in our marriages. Does that sound good? Harmony in our marriages.

This is also one of the scary passages for pastors to preach on because it has in it one verse that says ***"wives submit yourself to your own husbands as you do to the Lord."***

In commentaries there is often recorded the story of a great American Preacher who was famous in the 1940s. Dr Lewis Talbot once preached on this passage at the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles. And as he preached on 'wives submit to your husbands' this passionate man pounded the pulpit, the veins in his neck bulging. After the service he went and stood at the door to shake people's hands as they left. One of the first people that came to meet him was a huge lady. This woman got into his face and said, "Dr Talbot, that message today was disgusting! To tell you the truth, Dr Talbot, if you were my husband I would put poison in your tea tomorrow morning."

Dr Talbot looked at her for a moment and said, "Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it."

Godly women have often looked at our text today aware of passages like

Galatians 3:28 ***There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

If that is so, in God's eyes we are all equal, then what is the deal with our text that says wives submit to your husbands, it sounds like there is a contradiction here.

I want to explain just one word before we boldly dive into our passage.

When used by the early church The Word "Head," *Kephale* in the Greek, meant source/ origin 95% of the time it was used and authority over around 5% of the time it was used. And so 95% of the time it is used it means that Christ is the source/ origin of the church or Adam is the source/ origin of Eve.

I used to fish in the headwaters of trout streams, but I have never been the head of a school or hospital department.

Let's read the Word together.

Ephesians 5:21-33 (NIV) ²¹ 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 Saviour. 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.

Our passage on marriage begins “submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

I want to suggest that if a Christian cannot submit to another Christian or to the local authorities or to their spouse, that person doesn't really trust God. If you and I have to be in control, if you and I have to win every argument, what does that really say about us? I believe it says we don't trust God. It suggests that we see our spouses and those around us as people we must control because we are the most important, we know best, our rights and our needs are number one. Which is very different to what the Bible teaches about preferring others above ourselves, serving others out of our love for our servant king – Jesus. If you or I must win every argument, if we have to always be right, if we have to correct those around us and make sure things our done our way – the right way? Doesn't that then say that we, not God, know best and scriptures like “all things are working together for the good of those that love God and are called according to His purposes” are just wrong.

If you and I cannot submit to others doesn't that then say we know best, not God and that we don't trust God? I think so!

Submitting to each other is what Christians do and when you look at the relationship between The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, submitting to each other is what the Trinity constantly do as well.

So husbands and wives submit to each other, why? Because that is how we roll as Christians, that is the model Christ gave to us, we are about walking humbly before God and loving others.

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 Saviour. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

This verse clearly says wives are to submit to their husbands, but if you read it in context there is an overarching principle that comes from the preceding verse that men are to submit to their wives as well.

So vs 22-24 cannot be an invitation for husbands to be dictators over their wives. So what does it mean? Why stress 'wives submit to your husbands' just after Paul was inspired to write submit to each other.

I want to suggest two things in answer to that question.

Firstly, as we shall see when we get to vs 33, men, though equal to their wives in gifting and ability and importance to God, have a deep need to be respected. That is how we are made and for there to be harmony in the marriage it needs to be a marriage where both have to be submitted to each other. If she constantly corrects her husband or criticizes him, or doesn't value his work and dreams and ideas that will have a devastating effect on his sense of self worth and of being loved.

- a) **Men need to feel respected to do well in marriage and life.** To become all that they can be. For a man to excel in life he needs a wife who will value him, and her listening to him, her valuing his ideas and dreams and work is a key part of that.
- b) **Men appear to be held more accountable/ responsible for the families wellbeing before God than their wives.**

Now this might seem a politically incorrect, even dangerous thing to say in our day and age but to me it appears that is what we see in the Old Testament stories of Eli and his wayward sons or of Abraham and Sarah and their mistakes. I am not sure how OT models transfer to NT covenant times and yet both Paul and Peter hold up Abraham and Sarah's marriage as a model marriage.

In their marriage there are times when Sarah submits to Abraham's instructions even though his instructions are ungodly and clearly immoral and yet, God protects and blesses her for her submission to her husband. Also there are times in their marriage when Abraham submits to Sarah's advice that he sleep with her hand maiden. This was ungodly advice which Abraham submitted to quite readily and the consequences are still being felt today between the Jewish

and Arab nations. It's interesting to me that when Sarah says to Abraham, "You have got to send away Ishmael the son of the servant girl," Abraham is heartbroken and protests greatly and yet God says Abe, listen to the voice of your wife and do it. And so reluctantly he submits to her and sends the boy and his mom away.

I am in no doubt that in the Old Testament the husband is held accountable, responsible for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the family.

Husbands, being held more accountable for your families wellbeing should not make you proud or bossy, it should make you humble and careful.

Wives, please note, that your decision to listen to, respect, support your husband is based not on whether he is always wise or worthy of that respect but on your submission to Jesus and your conviction that God will protect and bless your family.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)

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.

Wives, submit to your husbands, but also husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

How did Jesus love us?

- a) Unconditionally**
- b) Sacrificially**

Husbands love your wives, unconditionally.

How does Jesus love the Church? He loves us unconditionally. He doesn't love us more if we have been spending extra time in our morning devotions.

He doesn't love us more if we tithe.

He doesn't love us more if we serve in the church for longer hours.

No, His love is unconditional and not dependant on your performance.

In the same way guys; love your wives unconditionally.

Don't say; I'll only love her if .. she does the dishes or if she laughs at my jokes or if she pleases me.

Husbands you are just to love your wives, period.

It's not that you are to love her when.. or love her if ... husbands you are just to love her.

Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. Jesus loves the church unconditionally and ... He gave himself for us.

He loves us sacrificially.

Any husband who takes this scripture literally will say that he is going to lay down his life for his wife. And to tell you the truth any woman in the world will have no trouble respecting and supporting a husband that loves her unconditionally and sacrificially.

It would seem to me that if a man is to love his wife sacrificially that would suggest that he would want to serve her, to give up things and priorities that he had in order to make her feel loved, to show her that he values her.

To love sacrificially means being willing to give up my agenda in support of her agenda and her needs.

Jesus would never walk away from the church and find another bride. In the same way husbands just love your girls unconditionally and sacrificially.

In our DIY marriage manual I talk there about the kiwi 50/50 myth. In NZ people often say that you will have a good marriage if .. he contributes 50% of the effort and if ... she contributes 50% of the effort. That is a very unbiblical and unchristian concept. If I were to summarize our text today on how to live in harmony in a marriage it would go something like this:

Husbands and wives, submit to each other out of your love for Jesus.

Wives, especially remember that your husband needs your respect, he needs you to value his ideas and what he does, and girls, if you do, God will bless you and your family.

Husbands, God wants you to love your wives unconditionally and sacrificially.

There is no 50/50 concept in Ephesians.

My summary of Paul's teaching would be to say: Girls, give him 100% whether he deserves it or not and Guys give her 100% whether she deserves it or not, because if you do that your marriage will reflect the very character of the God-head, your spouse will become all that they can be and you will have harmony in your marriage.

What joy and security we would bring to our families and what a witness it would be to our neighbours, if we took the me out of marriage and made it all about honouring Him!