



Marriage for God's Glory and Your Joy

Series: *The Grand Plan of the Glorious God*

Ephesians 5:22-33

November 7, 2010

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By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul has been careful to explain what that transformation looks like in terms of personal sanctification. Then Paul laid out for us what that the new creation should look like in terms of corporate worship as we looked at last week. Now today, Paul will make application to our homes and in particular to our marriages. These are priceless words. This picture of marriage is a glorious picture and it is the very thing that we are commanded to pursue. As we get into this text this morning, let me just make ten foundational statements or observations regarding marriage and this message.

1) Ten foundational statements

1. **Whatever else that we say about marriage, the ultimate thing that we can say about marriage is that it exists for God's glory.** Marriage is fashioned to be a concrete expression, a display of the covenant love between Christ and His church, of the steadfast and gracious love of Christ for His church and of the devotion of the church to her Savior. This is the first and ultimate purpose of marriage. Marriage is meant to reveal the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His church. That is why Paul says (**Eph 5:31-32**) Marriage is to picture the intimate love enjoyed by Christ and His church – that is what we are to strive for. Our marriage must seek to display the beauty of the relationship between Christ and His church.

2. **If that is the case, then Christian marriage should be the source of great joy and delight for both husband and wife.** Just as Christ delights in His bride, so should a Christian husband find great joy and pleasure in His own wife. And just as the church delights in the steadfast love of her bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, so should a wife find joy and delight in the steadfast love of her husband. The glory of God and the joy of His people are united.

3. **The roles of husband and wife in a Christian marriage are not open to redefinition and re-interpretation.** The roles of the husband and the wife in marriage are not arbitrary in their design. They are designed by God and so for that reason, they are not open to re-design and they are not reversible. The role of the husband and wife in Christian marriage are grounded in and take their shape from the distinctive roles of Christ and His church. If you have found a

system that “works for you” that is not in keeping with Scripture, there is a word for that – rebellion.

4. Headship and submission in Christian marriage is not the result of sin, but remedy to it.

Headship and submission were woven into the very fabric of creation – Adam was formed first and then Eve. When sin entered the creation, it destroyed the joy of marriage because it distorted man’s loving servant headship into dominance on one hand or apathy and passivity on the other. Sin warped woman’s loving submission into manipulation or blatant defiance in some or fearful groveling in others. The headship and submission of Christian marriage is designed to remedy that corruption.

5. The presupposition for proper understanding and application of this text is the salvation and submission of its hearers to God. This text is for Christians. The ungodly will never understand this text properly. It will be offensive to them because it is entirely opposite of the flesh-driven, sin-shaped experience of marriage in our culture. Paul is assuming that the husband and wife in this text are both saved and transformed by the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ.

6. The Christian expression of headship and submission is to be ongoing and growing. This is not a skill that one “gets down.” It is ongoing and growing; it must continue and will continue to develop throughout your married life. There will be failures and trials and tears and repentance and triumphs and joy and renewal and all of those things in your marriage if you are pursuing marriage for the glory of God and for your joy.

7. Whenever we preach regarding God’s design for marriage, we realize that there are people in marriages in this body that are facing all sorts of situations and issues. There is no way to cover every possible scenario that could exist in someone’s home. God is going to call us in His word to a marriage that is God-honoring and deeply satisfying and my intent is to preach this text as if the desire of everyone in this room is to have this kind of marriage, knowing that for some of you there are great challenges involved . You may live with an unbeliever. You may have an overbearing or passive husband, a domineering or unloving wife. So I want to encourage you in two ways – one, you may want to seek counsel with a pastor or an elder regarding questions that this sermon might raise regarding your specific situation and two, I want to encourage you that if God is powerful to raise a dead soul to life, He is powerful, as well, to resurrect a dead marriage.

8. This is a text that is valuable for those who are single. Some of you are single, anticipating marriage and this sermon this morning should serve as a divine description of the character that you should pursue for marriage as well as an insight into the sort of person you should

seek for marriage. Some of you are single with no expectation of marriage and this text should serve as a guideline for how you can pray for the marriages in this body.

9. The study of this text holds forth both great promise and great peril depending on how it is received. If you listen to this message and what you do is catalogue the ways in which your spouse has fallen short in your marriage, the promise that this text holds will be ruined. The purpose of this message is not for you to determine how you have been wronged and let down and failed but rather to have a pliable and willing and receptive heart to hear the Word of God regarding marriage and to ask God, “Lord, how have I fallen short of your plan for me as a husband or a wife? Where must I repent? God, by your grace, would you change me so I can love and honor and serve my spouse for your glory and for my spouse’s and my own joy?”

10. The gospel is at stake in the way that husbands and wives love and honor one another. Apart from faithful, long-lasting, strong, durable, God-glorifying marriages, we can never have churches that magnify the worth and greatness of God and that display the power of the gospel. If the marriages in this church look just like the marriages in the world, then we deny the sin-conquering, soul-changing, Christ-pursuing work of the gospel in us.

So let’s dig into this text with soft and receptive hearts to receive from God His truth regarding the glories of Christian marriage and I want to start by addressing the husbands first and let me tell you why. The reason is twofold. First, the proper context for joyful submission is loving headship. That is the context for our submission to Christ as His church, is it not? – that he loved us and gave himself up for us, chapter 5, and verse 2. Second, the love of God in Christ has been poured on us by divine initiative and not as a result of human effort. In other words, God does not love us because we first loved Him, rather we respond in submission; we love God because He first loved us. The man, then, is to be the initiator and the wife is to be the responder. So for that reason, I want for us to begin with the calling of the husband to love His wife as Christ loved the church.

2) Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church. (v. 25-30) God is commanding us, as husbands -- commanding us – to love our wives in the same way that Christ has loved the church. What we need to see here immediately is this: the priority in headship in the home is not authority, it is not the exercise of dominion; the priority is love. We are called to headship in our homes and headship of our wives but the headship that we are to exercise is to be expressed and rooted in love. Paul’s command is not “Keep your wife in submission...keep you wife in line” it is love your wife as Christ loved the church.

How did Christ love the church? He loved her unconditionally, in spite of her unworthiness; He loved us in spite of our deficiencies. He loved us not because of anything in us; He loved us in

spite of what was in us. Jesus died for His church, for His Bride to purchase her for Himself at a deep cost to Himself and to make her beautiful. He did not think of His rights, of His glory, for if He had, we never would have been saved. Because of the love with which He loved us, He gave Himself for us. Christ's love for His bride is a love that is unconditional, sacrificial and intense. That is the kind of love that we are commanded to love our wives with.

Men, let me tell you what this means. You set the tone for your home. We have it wrong in our society. We like to say that it is the role of the wife to create a climate of love in the home, but that is not so. You set the tone for your home, you set the tone for your marriage by the way in which you love your wife. Christ did not demand perfection in His church before He poured out His love upon us and neither can we as Christian husbands. The standard for our love for our wives is not if she is perfectly pleasing, but the standard is the gracious love of Christ. Unconditional, sacrificial, intense love sees your wife as your lover, as your sister in the Lord, as a treasure to be protected and cared for, that sees your wife as your best friend, that sees your wife as the most important human being in the world and your covenant love. Sacrificial love is love from a heart that is willing to lay aside your rights, your comforts, your personal pleasures, your personal pursuits, your personal time for the sake of your wife. We are instead called to look for ways to lay down our lives to show our wives the depth of our faithful love for them.

Paul goes on to describe the purpose of Christ's love in a couple of ways, first **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.** Christ's love is purposeful and powerful. He labors to present His church as splendorous and beautiful and holy and without blemish. In a similar way, a husband's job is to help his wife become all that God created her to be for Christ's glory. We must invest in our wives and in their lives. George Knight asks, "Just as Christ works to present His church to Himself as a glorious bride in a glorious marriage, should not the husband work to make his wife glorious and their marriage glorious?"

We should and specifically we must do that by encouraging our wives growth in grace. We must love God's Word and seek to cultivate a love for God's Word in our wives as well. You must take seriously the responsibility to pursue Christ with your wife and to take the lead – encouraging her, reading to and with her, fighting for her soul in personal prayer, praying with her, studying the Word of God with her, applying the Word of God to your marriage and in your home, discussing spiritual things, and taking the lead in modeling Christ. It means taking the lead in the very things that Paul has been describing here in Ephesians – in honesty, integrity, hard work, gracious speech, kindness, tenderness, forgiveness, and sexual purity. It means protecting your wife from the moral filth of this world as much as possible, guarding her from

spiritual error, protecting her from worldly influences and the wisdom of this age. It is standing in the gap for your wife, being a shield for her. She must be precious to you. This means, men, that if you're spiritually passive or if you are overbearing and cold to her spiritual needs, you are not a man in the sense of biblical manhood.

This is where love can be difficult sometimes. Helping your wife to grow in holiness means that sometimes you must lovingly confront sin in your wife with the Word of God. Too many men either leave this undone by just ignoring sin in the life of his wife because it is the easy thing to do or by confronting sin in sin, that is, with anger. Neither approach is loving. The loving approach is to gently and graciously come alongside your wife with the Word of God, to entreat her from Scripture, to graciously, by example and by teaching, apply the Word of God to her life.

But you cannot take your wife where you have never been. You must pursue godliness, you must abide in Christ, you must pursue the Lord, not only for your own sake but for the sake of your wife. You cannot lead where you are not going. And you cannot give what you do not have. You cannot love your wife with the love of Christ unless you are experiencing the love of God through communion with Christ.

Paul goes on to tell us: **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.** What Paul is getting at here is not some psychobabble about learning to love yourself so you can learn to love your wife. His point is this: Husbands love your wife just like you love your own body – as is made evident by the way you provide for it and protect it. This is about physical provision and protection. It is the responsibility of the husband to take the lead in providing for his wife and family – putting a roof over their heads, putting food on the table, clothes on their backs. The husband is to take the lead in this. That is not say that a wife may not work – she may, sometimes she may make more money but the man is take the lead to lay down his life to put bread on the table. If he is physically able, he sends the wrong message if he does not labor as he should for the sake of his wife and his family. A man ought to work. That is the idea. Even more, a man ought to protect his wife. Your wife ought to feel safe with you. She should know that you would lay down your life for her because she sees you care for her in small ways now. You ought to shield your wife and her life from danger. Too many guys are passive here and let their wives fight the battles that they should be fighting. I don't know what else to say here, it ought to be intuitively obvious. He who loves his wife loves himself because she is your own body.

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. The picture is one of intimacy. We are to

nourish our wives – to feed them as we have seen, spiritually and physically, but the last area, that the word cherish speaks to, is our caring for our wives emotionally. It is loving your wife deeply and expressing that love to her. Look for ways to demonstrate that you love your wife -- not merely sexually, but pursue her heart. Be sensitive to her needs, sensitive to her feelings, be affectionate, share your life with her. Some men kill their wives emotionally – comparing them to other women, denigrating her character, making her the butt of jokes. But we nourish our wives when we express our love to them in tenderness, with respect and with a sense of thanksgiving to God for them, when we praise them and express our gratitude to them for what they do, when they know that we are committed to them no matter what. And we express love to our wives when we express our love for them in words. Romancing your wife is right and good. Think of the Song of Solomon where the husband says to his wife things like this: **(Song 1:15; 2:14; 4:9-11)** Now I am not saying that you need to say it like that, but that kind of affection for our wives needs to be felt and expressed. Ligon Duncan summarizes it best when he says: **God calls Christian husbands, all Christian husbands, to a radical, God-originated, gospel-based, grace-empowered, Christ-emulating, self-denying love for our wives; a love in which we are to serve our wives and to care for our wives' best spiritual and temporal interests.** This is the way in which we lead our homes. It involves spiritual and physical provision and protection. Brothers, I have to ask you, how are you loving your wives?

Geoff Thomas says: **So as a husband you're always saying something about Christ in the way you relate to your wife and children. You can't help it. You are either displaying truth about Christ or telling lies about Christ. Either way, you are a picture of Christ to them, whether you want to or not. If you don't value your wife, you're sending the message that Christ doesn't value his church. If you don't care about your wife's wellbeing, you're sending the message that Christ is uncaring. If you are unfaithful, you're sending the message that Christ is unfaithful. If you don't love her, you're sending the message that Christ is unloving. If you're harsh, you're sending the message that Christ is harsh. If you don't lead your wife with wisdom and don't teach your family God's Word, you're sending the message that Christ does not lead his people or care how they think. If you're a bad husband, you are telling one rotten lie after another about Jesus Christ himself, and you make it hard for your wife and children to hear the truth of Christ and hard to live in the power of Christ. What a horror if your life proclaims falsehoods about Christ!**

On the other hand, if you're a godly husband, you are showing the truth of Christ. If you treasure your wife, you are sending the message that Christ treasures his church. If you make sacrifices to help your wife, you're sending the message that Christ gave himself up for us. If you're faithful to your wife, you're sending the message that Christ is faithful. If you care for

your wife with tender affection, you're sending a message about Christ's love. If you lead your family in Scripture and prayer, you're sending a message about Christ's wise leadership. If you're a godly husband, your words and example nourish your wife and children with the truth and power of Christ. What a privilege to make Christ real to your family!

A **godly wife** really has little difficulty submitting to a husband who leads by loving her. She knows that he seeks the very best for her and that he will not do anything to harm her. God designed that a wife's submission operates within a context of Christ's love. In that way, she is protected, covered, strengthened, guided and provided for. The godly husband loves his wife like Christ loves the church. I have never met a wife who is sorry she married such a man. She is glad for the honor of submitting to that sort of man. It is in the context of this love that the wives are called:

3) Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (v. 22-24) Let me give you definition of Biblical submission. Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership in the family and help him carry it through according to her gifts. It is to welcome his position as the God-ordained leader of the family. Submission is not putting the husband in the place of Christ as if the husband is some sort of absolute authority. Submission does not mean giving up independent thought. Submission does not mean being fearful and timid and cowering. The word "submit" comes from a military term that means to arrange under rank – to take your rightful place. What this passage is saying to us is that wives are called by God to recognize that the man bears a great responsibility before the Living God, for which one day he will give an accounting at the throne of God. The wife is to recognize that awesome weight of responsibility that the husband has, and support him in it.

Practically what does submission look like? Submission involves **respect**. Submission involves **honesty**. Submission involves **support**. It involves **encouragement in prayer**, not nagging. It involves caring for your husband's **basic needs**. Submission involves **responding** to your husband's efforts to lead and love you.

In fact, let me tell you four things that destroy biblical submission. **Qualifying Submission** - I will follow my husband if... The only occasion in which you should not follow your husband is if he asks you to go against God's Word. **Grudging Submission** - I will follow my husband but I don't like it... You follow but not joyfully. **Faithless Submission** - I will follow my husband but I'm afraid he won't lead us properly. **False and Patronizing Submission** – that condescending attitude that treats your husband as foolish and only pretends to go along with his leadership. Those things will destroy God's plan for the home. But ladies, you have been shaped to man that will lead their home spiritually with love and grace.

John Piper put it this way: "**[Submission] is an attitude that says, 'I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don't flourish when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works.' But the attitude of Christian submission also says, 'It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want to take me with you. You know I can't do that. I have no desire to resist you. On the contrary, I flourish most when I can respond creatively and joyfully to your lead; but I can't follow you into sin, as much as I love to honor your leadership in our marriage. Christ is my King.'"**

Submission is a commitment to support one's husband in such a way that he may reach his full potential as a man of God. This may involve several things: making the home a safe place; striving to be dependable and trustworthy; providing affirmation and encouragement; building loyalty to him in the children; showing confidence in his decisions even if you think you know a better way; being satisfied with the physical provision of your husband and what you have when he is working hard to provide; giving suggestions, advice, counsel, and even biblical correction to your husband but in a loving and respectful way; being forgiving and forbearing; not using love or the expressions of it as a weapon or to manipulate but loving your husband graciously and faithfully and keeping and guarding your heart only for him.

Ladies, here are some self-examining questions to consider whether or not you have a submissive spirit toward your husband: What thoughts spring to mind when you think of your husband? Are they respectful and loving? How do you speak to your husband when you are alone? When you are in front of your children? When you are in public? How do you speak of you husband to your kids? To your friends? To your family? To your co-workers? To your sisters in Christ? Do you show your husband respect in the way you act toward him? Do you freely show him affection? Do you seek to show him affection as well as respond to his overtures or do you mock his attempts at romance? Do you listen when he speaks to you, whether in public or in private? Do you engage with him or are you distracted, inattentive, indifferent, or disrespectful? Do you interrupt him? Do you welcome his counsel? Do you do the things that he asks you to do? Do you respond to your husband's spiritual leadership? Do you receive instruction from him in the Word of God – or do you wish you were married to John Piper or John MacArthur? Do you encourage His pursuit and growth in Christ? Do you encourage him in general? Do you have his back? Are you open to him and receptive and responsive to him? Do you love him and look for ways to serve him and please him? Do you support his decisions or do you subvert his leadership by manipulation or whining? Are you responsive to your husband or are you resistant? True biblical submission is an expression of real trust and love toward God, and of true love for your husband. It honors Christ, honors your husband, and displays the right and proper response of the church to Christ. When you reject your husband's headship, you are saying in effect, that the church has no need to submit to

Christ, that submission to him is unimportant and worthless. Submission to your husband is a part of obedience to the Lord. If you are fighting against the idea of being subject to your husband, your attitude reflects that you are really fighting against the Lord, who ordained this order in marriage.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Why does Paul add this phrase “in everything”? The instinctive temptation of our hearts is to try and figure out when God’s commands don’t apply to us. We are always looking for loopholes. Paul’s desire is that wives would be asking the Lord, “How can I fulfill this calling. How can I beautifully and joyfully submit to my husband and so bring glory to you?” That is the heart of submission and it delights God and both of these together – loving headship and loving submission reveal the mystery of Christ and His church.

4) The mystery of Christ and His church. (v. 31-33) Marriage is a mystery—it contains and conceals a meaning far greater than what we see on the outside. What God has joined together in marriage is to be a reflection of the union between the Son of God and his bride the church.

Whenever I marry a couple from this congregation, I give them a charge something like this. To the husband I will say: Brother, God has ordained that you should be the spiritual head, the responsible provider, and the pastor of your family. By His power, you must guard and nurture your wife, your strength should be a refuge for her, your character a source of praise to God, your love for her an unchanging certainty, and you must encourage her and nurture her to be everything that God has made for her to be. You are called to live so that she will find in you the covering for which the heart of a woman truly longs. A biblical man.

To the wife I will say: Sister, it is God's purpose that you be a loving wife, that you respond to your husband's love and nurture, that you would honor him and encourage him, that you would joyfully and willingly follow him as He follows after Christ, that you would exhort and support your husband as he leads your family, that together you would trust in Christ who has brought you together and sanctified your marriage, that you would have that inner beauty of soul that never fades which comes from faithful pursuit of Christ as Lord. That you would be a biblical woman.

Does this look like your marriage today? If marriage is good – praise God for His grace, foster it, nourish it, guard it. Continue to pursue Christ together.

Marriage is not working. Perhaps you are not submitting to you husband as you should – you find yourself fighting against submission, making excuse for why you cannot submit – repent and believe... Husbands, maybe you are failing to lead your wife, you are withdrawn, you find yourself apathetic or frustrated, you have failed in your calling to reflect Christ in the way that you relate to your wife – repent and believe...Pray earnestly for one another. Don’t make

demands and ultimatums. Find a time when the two of you alone, can sit down and talk openly, graciously, and gently with one another about the shortcomings in your marriage, where you can ask for one another's forgiveness and express your heart's desires for a marriage that brings glory to God and gives joy to your soul.

Perhaps what you need to do first today is to respond to the greater truth of which marriage is only a part... **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.**

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