

The Church's Married Women

Ephesians 5:15-33

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Introduction:

Last week in our sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life*, we began to look at the church's married people.

- Marriage is so important to the church that we are going to go deeper into this subject and look at the church's married women this week and then at the church's married men next week.
- I decided to look at wives first because Paul addresses them first in Ephesians 5 which is the passage we have launched our study on the church's married people from.

Last week, we saw how marriage is a beautiful picture of the relationship of Christ with His church.

- I am simply going to develop that in more detail looking at the incredible beauty that Jesus has appointed for the church's married women.
 - It will do us so much good if can see the beauty of this beauty.
 - Our sinful passions and desires get in the way of that, but let's pray and ask God to help us, shall we?

Listen as I read our text to you—Ephesians 5:15-33—the same as last week.

- This is the Word of God, so give careful attention.

Ephesians 5:15-33: See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. ¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the

church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

- Let's begin by looking at what Christian wives are supposed to do.

I. A Christian wife is to submit to her own husband as to the Lord.

- No one who believes the Bible to be the Word of God can dispute with that.
 - That is simply what the text says in Eph 5:22.
 - You may not like it, but there is nothing unclear about what it says.
 - The Bible stands in judgment of every culture including our own.
 - Let's unpack what this is saying.

A. Submit means "to line up under."

1. It is a word that denotes a person living in sync with those in authority—living in harmony with them.
 - It was often used as a military term for marching in step with one's leaders.
 - It is the opposite of isolation and independence.
 - It involves blending with others, conforming to them the way a symphony conforms to the conductor.
2. For a wife, it means finding out what is pleasing to her husband.
 - It is more than simply obeying orders...
 - It is a study of him to learn what pleases him and how to please him.
 - And then conforming to that.
 - It is to be done as to Christ, and that is exactly what we are told to do with Him—to learn what is pleasing to Him and to do it.
 - It is a beautiful thing to see a person truly devoted to another person so that they live in harmony with that other person.
 - We live in such a selfish day when everyone lives as a separate atom that is not connected to anyone else—it is an isolationist society.
 - It is truly a beautiful thing to see a courageous woman who is strong enough to break the ugly pattern of independence and follow the Lord.
3. And notice that verse 24 also says that the Christian wife—the Spirit filled wife—is to submit to her husband *in everything*.
 - Submission is not really going on until you are asked to do something that you don't want to do.
 - Anyone will do the things they want to do anyway, but the test comes when you know that your husband would like for you to (say) pay the bills more promptly, but you make no changes.
 - Some people will try to pick and choose with obeying the LORD...
 - For example, they will obey Him about helping the poor, but when it comes to keeping the Lord's Day—well, they were really wanting to watch a movie...
 - The beauty of submission begins to emerge when you cheerfully do what the one you are submitting to wants because of your devotion to them.

B. Notice how our text also says that a wife is to submit to her own husband.

1. The language of ownership is stressed in this passage.
 - It refers to her husband as her *own* husband both in verse 22 and in verse 24;
 - and you can see in verse 28 and 33 how it speaks of the husband's wife as his *own* wife.

- This emphasises the fact that husbands and wives truly do own each other.
 - We looked at this not too long ago in 1 Thess 4:4 where it says: “that each of you should know how (not in original) to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,”
 - I spoke to you about how in our isolation society, the idea of owning another person is horrifying—it is taboo!
 - But in truth it is a beautiful thing to be able to say, “I am yours and you are mine.”
 - There is a permanence about it, a security, an end to loneliness.
 - Vows have been made and it is treachery for me to take myself away from my spouse.
 - Even with our Lord Jesus, He has bought us with a price and that means that we belong to Him—and He belongs to us.
 - We can say that He is our Lord and our God...
 - And that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
 - Because this is so, He is committed to us and looks after us—as His own body.
 - It is a privilege to belong to Him—even though it puts many obligations on us.
 - The obligations are not weighty, and not bad; they are part of living in true relationship.
2. When it comes to submission, it means that the wife is to submit to *her* husband, not to someone else.
- a. She need not worry about pleasing someone else—only her husband.
 - It is no longer her friends or her parents that she is to worry about pleasing—it is her husband.
 - Some women will call up their parents or their friends and then challenge their husband by what their parents said.
 - This is contrary to God’s instruction to obey their own husbands.
 - Parents need to let their children go—they need to be careful not to interfere in the new relationship that is formed when a man leaves his father and mother and God joins him to a wife.
 - This relates to time as well—you need to make time for your husband or your wife—you have made a covenant of companionship with them.
 - If you are hanging out with friends and confiding in them instead of with your spouse, you are tearing apart your marriage.
 - b. Knowing that you are to obey your husband also makes decisions a lot easier.
 - The other day, a woman asked me as a pastor if she ought to take on a certain job at her church.
 - I asked her what her husband thought, and he had a very definite opinion that it was not something she would be suited for and that he did not think it was a good idea.
 - I told her, “well then, that makes it easy—you don’t have to worry about it—now you know what God wants you to do.”

- And she did find it quite relieving.
- It had been bothering her for several days because she felt guilty saying no—now she could simply tell them that she discussed it with her husband and that he did not think it was a good idea.
- I hope you know this in your relationship with God too...
 - Many decisions are simplified when you make pleasing the Lord your first order of business.
 - If an unbeliever wants to have a romantic relationship with you, you don't have to debate it—you know what God wants.
 - Submit to your own Lord.

C. Our text also instructs wives to see that they respect their own husbands.

- Do you see that in verse 33?—starting with the husband it says:
 - **Eph 5:33: “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.”**
- 1. There is something you need to know about the respect that is called for her.
 - We can think of respect in different ways.
 - There is what we might call natural respect—the kind that a person earns when they live in such a way that you admire them...
 - The other kind is the respect you have for someone who holds a position of authority over you—such as a police officer.
 - If he pulls you over and tells you to slow down, you don't say, “But I hardly even know you—why should I respect what you say? Are you an honest person? Do you treat other people well?”
 - That is irrelevant... he has a position of authority and that is why you respect him.
 - Well which kind of respect do you think God expects a wife to have for her husband?
 - The second kind—the kind she is to have the police officer.
 - God has put your husband over you in authority, not because he is a better person, but because God has appointed men to be the head of their wives as Christ is the head of the church.
 - He does not ask you to drum up respect for man who does not live an honourable life—He asks you to show respect for him because he is your husband.
 - That means that you should not speak to him in a demeaning or disrespectful manner...
 - You should not run him down to your friends, or roll your eyes when he makes a request of you or a decision you don't like.
- 2. But let me say as well, that although the kind of respect you are to give him is the kind that has nothing to do with his merit,
 - you should certainly desire to see his virtues as much as they can be found.
 - You should not focus on his weaknesses and ignore his virtues the way people do when they resent authority.

- And husbands, on your part, you should strive by God's grace to live in such a way that you earn the respect of your wife and children.
 - That is your duty, and if you do that, you will make it much easier for your wife to respect your place in the home.
 - But women, I hardly need to tell you that even when your husband is respectable, respecting your husband's place does not come naturally since the fall.
 - God said it would be hard for you as one who is fallen.
 - It is something you will have to work hard at.
 - You will need the grace of God whether your husband is living a respectable life or not.
 - The thing is though; you can never put the blame on him if you don't respect his place as your husband.

TRANS> So there you have the duty of a Christian wife summed up...

- She is to submit to her own husband in everything, and she is to show him respect.
 - Being devoted to another person like that is such a beautiful thing.
 - As a Christian, you have been filled with God's Spirit so that you live beautifully in the calling of God.
 - Ask Him to help you.
 - And do you know what will be the result if you do this?
- Something magical happens when a woman truly submits to her husband...
 - It is similar to what happens when you sow a field with seed.
 - That field—that field of dirt—is transformed into a life-giving place of fruitfulness.

II. God transforms the home of a godly woman who submits to her husband into a beautiful life-giving place.

A. God joins a woman to a man to make them fruitful together.

1. When He created the first man and the first woman, He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.
 - It is a marvellous thing that through their union, they can actually bring forth souls that will live forever.
 - a. But of course the fruitfulness that God called for was not merely the multiplication of people—but the multiplication of *godly* people!
 - He does not want an earth filled with wicked people—He already destroyed the earth because of that in the time of Noah...
 - And He is going to cast all the wicked into the lake of fire at that last day.
 - Bringing forth offspring that are dead in trespasses and sins is not fruitfulness—even if you have fifty demon children—that is not the fruitfulness God intended.
 - As it says in Mal 2:15 of those divorcing their wives, **But did He not make them one...? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.**
 - God wants godly offspring, and divorce and children born out of wedlock hinder that.

- b. But let me tell you...before God made the woman and brought her to the man,
 - Even Adam in his unfallen state could not be fruitful and multiply by himself.
 - He could not produce more image bearers of God... obviously... not until God brought the woman to him.
 - God made her to be a helper (an ezer) for him...
 - And as soon as they were joined together, their home became fruitful—a life-giving place.
2. Consider that in scripture it is not the man, but the woman who is especially described as the fruitful vine.
- That is how she is described, for example, in Psalm 128 where it says,
 - **Ps 128:3: Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house...**
 - After the fall, God told Eve that she would bring forth children in sorrow...
 - there would be many struggles—not only in the birth process, but also in the whole process of bringing up children.
 - But by God’s grace, as shown in Psalm 128, a godly woman can still be a fruitful vine in her husband’s house.
 - Not only fruitful in bringing forth children, but in making her home a beautiful life-giving source enriching the church and the world.
 - A godly woman who is unable to have children can be a fruitful vine in other ways (as we shall see shortly).
3. But to be fruitful, the married woman is called to be a manager of her home, a domestic, one taking care of household affairs.
- a. In Titus 2:4-5, the older women are instructed **that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.**
 - You see that they are to love their husbands and their children—but notice that it also says expressly that they are to be homemakers.
 - The word homemaker means a domestic, someone who looks after the things of the home.
 - b. This is something that is rarely looked at as important in our day.
 - I am not suggesting that we should make some rigid rule that every woman can only work so many hours out of the home...
 - just that we need to see that the general plan of God for the Christian home is that the wife look after things at home.
 - She is to be oriented toward the home.
 - c. One of the great advantages of marriage is that the home can become a place of fruitfulness... where life is imparted to others.
 - A husband can go out to work, but his wife can labour to do this very important work of making their home a place where people are taken care of.

- Because we have neglected this, we have all sorts of homes for older people and infirm people, and we carry a heavy tax burden to pay people do in institutions what could be done at home...
 - child care, caring for elderly, looking after the sick, ministering to the poor, and ministering to strangers and to the weary or the broken.
 - A home can be such a life-giving place.
- d. Let me give you a wonderful illustration of this from Rosaria Butterfield's book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*.
 - She was a radical lesbian PhD tenured professor who came to know Christ.
 - She has since married and she is living out what I have been talking about as a fruitful vine in her husband's home.
 - She had taken in a young woman into their home because the young woman needed a place to go to recover from surgery.
 - Rosaria tells what happened on the third day the woman was in their home:
 - READ

B. Now let's take a look at how a godly woman's fruitfulness and beauty is described in scripture!

- Let's take a little survey of the scripture and see what it says.
- 1. Paul describes her ministry in his first epistle to Timothy.
 - a. In 1 Timothy 2:9-11, he says that good works are to adorn her.
 - Here he instructs women that they are not called to lead the prayers of the church or to teach Bible lessons or rule...
 - They are rather to focus on good works... there are so many good works that need to be done!
 - After exhorting the men to lead in prayer, Paul says:
 - **1 Tim 2:9-12: in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, ¹⁰ but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. ¹² And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.**
 - I hate it when people read a passage like that and say, "so women aren't allowed to do anything in the church—they can't pray and they can't teach..."
 - But are you reading the same passage?
 - It says that they are to adorn themselves with good works!
 - That is a huge never ending task.

- True, it is not as glamorous as teaching or leading in prayer—but it certainly is beautiful and wonderful and pleasing to the Lord!
 - Those with showy gifts are in danger of pride and having their reward in this life, but those who are adorned with good works will have a great reward.
 - And notice, good works are to be a godly woman’s beauty—her adorning...
 - Pretty clothes and pretty faces are everywhere, but good works are a precious gem.
- But Paul does not describe what good works look like here.
- He is just setting them over against a woman teaching, leading in prayer, or fixing herself up...
 - But if you would like to hear more about the good works—
- b. Paul paints a picture of the good works godly women are to adorn themselves with over in chapter 5.
- Look at 1 Timothy 5.
 - He is talking here about the church supporting widows—and he basically says that only if they don’t have family to support them, and interestingly, only if they have a reputation for good works.
 - He is not talking about feeding them when they are hungry, but about giving them a regular living.
 - Look at how he describes the good works that any godly woman was expected to do in 1 Tim 5:9-10:
 - **1 Tim 5:9-10: Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, ¹⁰ well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.**
 - These are things that a woman can do around the home when she is a keeper at home.
 - Now if she is just staying at home watching TV or surfing the internet, she is missing the opportunity God has given her to minister to the saints and to those in need.
 - There are so many needy people around—and remember, the older women also have the task of teaching the younger women how to keep house.
2. Proverbs 31 gives an even fuller picture of the fruitful woman in her home.
- I read it to you earlier, but let me highlight a few things that it says—
 - But first let me mention that this woman did not do all of these things at the same period of life—this is a picture of what she did over the course of her whole life—not what a typical week looked like.

- I say that because some of you women are tender creatures and though you are very much like this woman, you find her example discouraging because you feel like you need to do all this in the coming week. Not so.
 - Look at the portrait of her as an inspiration for the things you can do over the course of your whole life.
- a. First off, look at the opening verse about her—proverbs 31:10.
 - It speaks of her value: **Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.**
 - Don't listen to the world when they say of a woman like this—oh, she doesn't do anything—simply because she doesn't have an office job...
 - At the same time, women, don't be overly sensitive either—some people simply mean that you don't have a job outside the home when they say that and nothing more.
 - But many think that it is a much lower calling to be a virtuous wife than say—a brain surgeon.
 - But the truth is, there are a lot of brain surgeons but there are not many virtuous wives.
 - Don't evaluate value by pay cheques.
 - This woman's husband is said to have no lack of gain.
 - b. We are told how she labours hard to provide for the needs of her household—food, clothing...
 - I remember a man telling me how much the quality of his life went up when his wife left her office job to come home.
 - He would come home to a peaceful home with a nice meal, and with a situation where they could have friends over or easily go to a meeting—and where the family could enjoy each other's company.
 - She is there, making home a lovely place, a nice place, a pleasant place.
 - God wants us to live life in this way rather than in a constant rat race.
 - c. And notice that ministry just flows out from such a home.
 - Verse 20 says: **She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.**
 - She is a life-giver.
 - She is available to care for people who are in need.
 - d. And she is industrious.
 - A diligent woman in the home can find ways to produce some income, and even if she doesn't actually do that,
 - she saves the family lots of money by taking on tasks that others have to pay for—like book keeping or home improvement projects or laundry—all sorts of things.
 - e. And you see that she also brings up children so that her children rise up and call her blessed (v. 28).
 - She has watched over the ways of her household—she has been there for them—instead of always unavailable.

- She has been mindful of their struggles and helped them work out their issues... far more effective than a professionally trained counsellor that you visit once or twice a week.
- f. And it speaks of how her husband prospers as a leader in the community.
 - He is so enriched by the fruit of his wife that he is able to do great things in the community.
 - I spoke to a CEO who told me that he had come to realise that a stable home and strong marriage had more to do with the success of the men he hired than anything else.
 - There are many prosperous men with godly wives who owe most of their prosperity to their wife.
 - She provides a place of rest and tranquility, a place of fruitfulness and blessing, and he receives of her life-giving fruit along with everyone else.
- g. But let me add that for a home to be a truly life-giving place, she must, as v.26 says, open her mouth wisdom and have the law of kindness on her tongue.
 - A nice home and a nice meal with strife does not bring forth fruit.
 - It is not beautiful or life-giving, but a destructive place where death is administered.
- But what is this woman's secret? How is it that she is fruitful?
 - Her secret is given in verse 30... she fears the Lord.
- 3. She is fruitful only because she fears the LORD.
 - That is the beginning of wisdom.
 - She knows that He alone in Christ alone is the source of life and strength.
 - She is filled the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of life and fruitfulness where there would otherwise be death.
 - Listen to verse 30 and 31—you can see that she has fruit because she fears the LORD: **Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.**
 - She does what she does because she fears the LORD.
 - She is not trying to make a show—she is simply responding to Him in love who first loved her.
 - If that is not so, her works will fail.
 - She will bring forth death instead of life.

TRANS> So you see how the Bible speaks of the beauty that God wants for a Christian wife!

- She is someone who is truly devoted to her husband—who lives to please him—and being that kind of person, she is a life-giver to her children and to many others.
 - It is so rare to see a woman who truly does submit to her husband, but what good comes out of it when she does!

III. Her example is an example for us all!

- A. We are the bride of Christ, His church, and we are to submit to the LORD the way a godly woman submits to her husband!
 - Yes, we are live to please our Lord.

- We are not to pick and choose how we obey Him, but to obey Him in all things...
 - To study to learn what pleases Him and then to give ourselves wholeheartedly and unreservedly to do it.
 - It is unnatural for fallen sinners to do this.
- B. But when we are joined to Jesus as our husband, we become fruitful.
- God blesses our union with Christ and He transforms us when we come to Christ.
 - We who were dead in sin are now able to do God works that God had prepared beforehand for us to walk in.
 - We who were dead are now alive in Christ.
 - And Christ Himself provides for us so that we can focus on bearing fruit.
 - He gives us the Holy Spirit and He gives us atonement for the forgiveness of our sins so we can now serve!
 - Our life blossoms with beauty and fruitfulness because we have come to Him.
 - No longer do we have to carry around guilt for our sins.
 - No longer do we have to rely on a stony heart, for He gives us a new one when we come to Him.
 - Just as a married woman has a unique opportunity to bear fruit, so do we when we make our home with Jesus Christ.
 - He pays the bills and we are able to serve.
- C. The crazy thing is, we find our life not by hanging onto it, but by losing it.
- Our identity is now found by losing our independence to become one with Him.
 - just as a wife's identity is found in submitting to her husband.
 - It is counter-intuitive—you are dying in order that you might live...
 - But that is how biblical mathematics works.
 - You die and then God raises you up.
 - Unbelief keeps you from doing it—you hold on to your life and you end up losing it because you have no faith.
 - The truth is, the more you lose your life for Christ your husband, the more you find it...and the more a godly wife loses her life for her husband, the more she finds it.