

LOVE AND RESPECT – THE FOUNDATION OF A HAPPY FAMILY

Ephesians 5:21–33

Key Verse: 5:33

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

There is an increasing pessimism about marriage in our culture, and this is especially true to young adults. They believe their chances of having a good marriage are not great, and even if married, many of them may be miserable. However, statistics show that if you are a reasonably well-educated person with a stable income, come from an intact family and are religious and marry after 25 without first having a baby, your chances of having a happy marriage is high. There are surprisingly many good points for marriage such as financial stability, better physical and mental health and mutual support in all occasions, not to mention sharing a wonderful life of faith in Christ together. Today’s passage gives us practical wisdom in building up a happy and blessed marriage and in establishing wonderful families in God.

The main point of today’s passage is for husbands to love their wives as the head of the wife and for wives to respect and submit to their husbands.

First, how to be a respectful wife

Look at verses 22-24: **“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husband as you do 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.”**

The role of a wife is incredibly powerful in the life of her husband. True? I have a question for all wives here: Do you want to help your husband and respect him and pray for him? I assume yes, so let’s think about how to respect your husbands.

The word “submit” does not mean just being silent without question or absolutely passive letting your husband make all the decisions. Rather, think of the word submit as help. In other words, submit to your husband means help your husband.

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There is a good example of a wife's submission to her husband in Timothy Keller's case. In the late 1980s, his family was situated in a nice suburb of Philadelphia where Tim held a full time position as a professor. Then he got an offer to move to New York City to plant a new church. He was excited, as well as afraid because he didn't know much about Manhattan and whether or not planting a church there would be successful. Also it would consume a lot more of their time and energy. His wife Kathy had serious doubts that it was the right choice, so Tim said, "Well if you don't want to go, then we won't go." But Kathy replied, "If you think this is the right thing to do, then exercise your leadership and make the choice. It's your job to make the decision and it is my job to wrestle with God until I can joyfully support your call." Tim made the decision to move to New York City and plant the Redeemer Presbyterian Church. The whole family, including their children, considers it one of the most truly manly things he ever did. Although he was quite scared, he felt a call from God, and it was clear to them that God worked in and through them when they accepted their gender roles as a gift from God.

Why should wives submit at times like this? It is not because wives are not decisive enough. The fact is that many wives can be more decisive than their husbands. For example, an article in USA Today says that "Women are mostly better investors than men. When it comes to making investment decisions, women tend to keep the bigger picture in mind and are not rushed into investments before conducting research or seeking professional advice." In contrast, the majority of men prefer to make financial decisions entirely on their own, which means they have a better chance to make stupid decisions on investments.

So why are wives called to this position of submission? The answer can be found in the life of Jesus. Jesus obeyed God and fully submitted himself to the will of God to die on the cross for the sin of the world. It is the mark of his greatness. Likewise wives are called to follow Jesus in submitting to their husbands. Submitting to their husbands as Jesus submitted himself to God's will, does not mean wives are inferior. Rather it makes them more respectful and godly wives, worth far more than rubies. Now I want to talk about what it means to submit to husbands and be a respectful wife in more practical ways.

1. Encourage your husband. Remember that how you think of your husband shapes your behavior for your husband. Do you think your husband as hopeful, or hopeless? A most effective way that a wife can show respect to her husband is to encourage him. Believe it or not, every man wants to be encouraged by his wife. If

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everyone else says your husband is not handsome, but you say his is handsome, he feels he is really handsome. If everyone else says he is handsome, but you say he is not, then he feels he is really ugly. Actually this is true to wives as well. In fact many husbands are dying for wives' encouragement. He needs you to encourage him so that he can find enough strength to lead your family like Jesus.

2. Your husband needs your help. Man needs a helper. Not just a helper, but a suitable helper as Genesis chapter 2:18 says. It is not because men are a helpless species, but God made man in that way. Wives, your husband needs your help. If you do not know how to respect your husband or help him, ask him. He will give you some hints.

3. Do not say negative comments about your husband in front of others and children. If you say in front of your children, “Your dad screwed up again. He always screws up. I do not know why I married him. I will never marry him again if I have a chance to remarry.” If you disrespect your husband in front of others, nobody will respect your husband. This is a lose, lose situation. Because if your husband tries to argue with your negative comments, he is mean to you. If he does not say anything, he is accepting that he is weak and does not deserve respect from anyone.

4. Be sweet instead of nagging. Some wives try to fix up their husbands in a short period of time by pushing, demanding, nagging and sometimes crying. When wives cry, husbands don't know what to do. They just look at the ceiling helplessly. Proverbs 25:24 says, “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” I do not want to go any further about a quarrelsome wife. When you feel nagging, choose sweeter words instead. Your husband knows what you are trying to say. Your one sweet word takes away all the stress of the day from your husband.

Second, what it means to be the head of the wife and love like Jesus.

Look at verse 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 Savior.**”

The Bible clearly says that Christ is the head of the church. Likewise, verse 23 says that the husband is the head of the wife. We are not going to argue with that because the Bible says very clearly that the husband is the head of the wife. But the question is “Are you a good head of your wife or not?” Being the head of

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the wife is actually a great and biblical responsibility for men. Even if you do not want to be the head of your wife, you are already designated to be the head by God. Some single men say, “I can’t wait until I get married,” thinking only about the romantic aspect of the marriage. But loving your wife as Christ loved the church is not a small job. It is a huge responsibility.

The role of headship is the most misunderstood area. Some men might think that being a husband brings entitlement of doing whatever pleases him. But being the head of the wife does not mean that the husband should exercise authority to demand unconditional obedience from his wife. Actually, we live in a day that many young men look inferior compared to women. Currently more young women are attending colleges, taking leadership roles in schools, attending church, and even obtaining driver’s licenses compared to young men. However when a stalemate has to be broken, the wife should try to respect the husband’s leadership. When both parties cannot agree, what should be done? This should be the place where the Bible calls “head” kicks in.

The fact that the husband is the head of the wife does not mean that he is the highest authority. There are church authorities, government authorities, and above all there is God’s authority. If S. Rich Ryzewski, a police officer, gives you a ticket because you did not stop at the stop sign, you have to receive the ticket and pay the fine. You cannot say, “If you give me a ticket, I will give you a ticket because I have the same authority as you do.” If you say that, he may give you two tickets. We have to submit to the higher authority, especially, when it comes from God.

Verse 25 reads, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”** No husband can do what Christ did for all of us. Then how can husbands love their wives as Christ did? Verses 26 and 27 say, **“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.”** One of the elders said that husbands are responsible for even their wives’ wrinkles on the face. Husbands need to lead wives to be cleansed by the word of God and live a holy and blameless life until their wives’ faces become radiant.

Verse 28 says that he who loves his wife loves himself. Also 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that the woman is the glory of man. In other words, the wife reflects the husband. Everyone loves himself and wants to love himself. Then he needs to love his wife. Let’s think about a few practical ways for husbands to love their wives.

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1. Love your wife as she is. Love your wife as she is, not what you hope she would become. Some might say, “I will really love my wife if she cooks delicious food for me or loses some weight.” But this is not right, you must love your wife as she is, not who she can be. Jesus did not love us because we met all the criteria of a good person. Jesus loved us and accepted us just as we are. So love your wife as she is.

2. Our most important human relationship is with our wives. Of course our most important relationship is with Christ. But our most important human relationship and friendship is with our wives. You may think, “I work hard and put food on the table so I am a good husband and a good friend of my wife.” But your wife may not think so. Just ask her if you are a really good friend. Good friends talk about everything together, share life together whether good or bad, laugh together, cry together, enjoy happy and sorrowful moments together. As verse 21 says, “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**”

3. What can keep the marriages together during rough times? It is the vows we made before God at the time of our wedding. We made a promise before God that the husband would love his wife and the wife would respect her husband in health and in sickness until parted by death. Sometimes couples are faced with really hard times such as financial difficulties, or serious health issues. But the vows we made keep us going. No matter what happens, you need to love each other regardless.

4. Husbands are responsible for the well-being of their families. They need to protect their wives and children from the evil in this tough world. It is men’s responsibility as the head of the family. If there is a strange sound at night, don’t say to your wife, “Oh honey, I am so scared. Can you go out and check it out?” It is your responsibility to go out and see if any thieves are out there. If your son or daughter messes up at school or with their friends, you need to be involved and help them out. It is a way to love your wife and lead like Jesus as the head of the family.

5. Your wife is like a garden and you are the gardener. As a gardener, you have to take care of your garden. We all like beautiful gardens, but we don’t like gardening because it requires lots of work. I have a garden front and back. It is not easy to take care of the garden all year long. We cannot complain saying, “Man, my garden has too many weeds. Man, my garden has too many rocks and the soil is too bad for plants to grow.” Too bad. It is your garden and you are responsible to

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weed out, take rocks away and cultivate the soil for plants to grow and bear fruits. When you do, your garden will look beautiful and fruitful.

6. We all know how powerful love languages work in a marriage. What it tells us is basically they must send love in forms that the other person can receive and appreciate. For example, if a husband send an “I love you” message to his wife by sending movie tickets while his wife wants to sit down with him and talk, she would not feel that she was loved even if the husband did his best to express his love for her. In a marriage, so often love is being sent, but is not received.

God himself understood this love language very well because human beings would not understand who God is unless they see God in their practical lives. So God sent himself in a human form we could relate to. Through Jesus and his life on earth, we can grasp who God is and his amazing love language, grace and love, for each one of us.

One of my love languages is to travel and eat nice meals. My wife’s love language is to serve, especially servants of God like Dr. Lee and Mother Barry. So she spent lots of her time with them, not with her family. My children longed for our first family trip, but it was not realized until they became adults. Actually my wife and I thought at that time that having a family trip was not a spiritual activity so we did not pursue it. When we finally realized the importance of having quality time as a family, we decided to go for our first family trip about 8 years ago when my first son was 24. Since then we have a family trip once a year. My children say nowadays that our family is the number one family in the whole world.

During our elders’ group Bible study on this passage, we talked about which would be harder – loving wife or respecting husband. We all agreed that it is harder for husbands to love wives than wives to submit to their husbands. Probably we feel a heavy responsibility as the head of the family in all aspects of our lives.

Now to all unmarried people: I hope I didn’t scare you from wanting to establish a Christian home after hearing about what it means for the husband to be the head and love like Jesus and for a wife to submit to her husband. Believe it or not, surveys say that the number of married people who say they are very happy in their marriage is pretty high. Most striking news of all, two-thirds of those unhappy marriages will become happy within five years if they stay married and do not get divorced.

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During the last two decades, research evidence shows that people who are married consistently show much higher degrees of satisfaction with their lives than those who are single, divorced, or living with a partner. Also children who grow up in married, two-parent families have two to three times more positive life outcomes than those who do not.

I pray that many young adults here may establish godly house churches and all married couples may have wonderful home loving and respecting each other out of reverence for Christ. May God establish many godly and beautiful house churches in and among us. Amen.

Let's read verse 33 together: **“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”**