

Marriage in Theory and Practice

Quick Review:

- Fighting but seated in victory
- Weak but filled with power
- Separate but unified in Christ

“Why Marriage?” Is it for love? For companionship? A right? An old-fashioned tradition? A cultural building block? Why only two people?

*The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific **rights that allow persons**, within a lawful realm, **to define and express their identity**. From the statement of Justice Kennedy, supreme Court Judge*

Even if the Constitution *did* offer the freedom to define ourselves (which it doesn't), it would have no power to do so. God defined our identity at our creation.

Genesis 1:27 *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Christian women must *understand* and *live out* marriage as God defines it.

Easier—we shine like stars in the dark night

Harder—you can't believe the culture's message

I. The Theory (Cosmology) of Marriage

Marriage has a mysteriously deep meaning in God's creation. In vv. 31–32, Paul goes to creation:

Ephesians 5:31–32 *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

God officiated the first marriage in the garden, bringing the woman to the man. —A “WOWing success.” It was and still is a picture of God's love for his bride. The devil hates that portrait of God's love! He tries to mangle the image because marriage is difference in unity and gloriously exhibits the difference in unity that God has with his bride. The transcendent God, outside his creation, becomes our tender, loving husband. This is Paul's “mystery.”

Our beloved Pastor Ted put it brilliantly:

The stunning truth is that the gospel that we associate with the new covenant and the New Testament was present at the very beginning, even before the fall. Traditionally, we are taught that the first expression of the gospel in the Bible is the so-called proto-evangelium at Gen.3:15, where in the context of cursing the serpent for bringing about the Fall, God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head and you shall bruise his heel.” That certainly is an expression of the gospel, but actually, according to Paul, the first

glimpse of the gospel was in pre-fall creation itself – woven into the perfect, unwarped-by-sin creational structures of one man-one woman-one flesh. That creational structure of one man living with one woman in a one-flesh lifetime commitment is a living, breathing, dancing, pulsating, multiplying image of how Jesus Christ loves and binds himself to his people. And now the boundaries on the way we live as sexual beings begin to look a lot less arbitrary and a lot more purposeful and serious.¹

Now you know WHY the culture is out to destroy marriage. What can we do to help?

As Christian women, we can both explain why marriage is so crucial, and also live it out in ways that reveal the mystery of the gospel to unbelieving friends. Don't think you're not evangelizing if you are a stay-at-home wife and mom. You are helping your children and the world around you see the glory of Christ and the church. That's a way of preaching the gospel!

If you are a widow, a divorcee or have never been married, you submit directly to your husband God without a "representative" human husband. In some ways, this is easier (you make your own decisions before God and have freedom to use time for kingdom activities that married women cannot give) and in other ways more difficult (you lose perspective, companionship and the human protection a husband brings).

II. The Practice of Marriage

A. The Mutual Submission of Humble Service

"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." vs 21

1. General Humility: "with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (Phil 2:3); "...whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mt. 20:26–28); ^{NAS} 1 Pet 5:5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
2. In marriage, there is "mutual" submission in that both husband and wife must take on Christ's attitude of self-sacrifice. (Next week, just see what husbands must do! 😊)
3. Sacrificing does not negate authority, however. A father who kneels to pick up the meal his angry child has thrown on the floor is still father, though a "servant" in that moment.
4. Ultimately, mutual submission is not an absolute definition. Dr. Baugh says:

Absolute mutual submission is popular today, particularly where egalitarian or democratic social and political philosophies rule. Paul's general idea of proper submission, however, is explained and illustrated through the particular examples of family relations he develops in 5:22-6:9...Submission is not absolute for any party, but an individual submits in some ways to some people and not in other ways to others.²

B. The Submission of Role

The Greek verb "hupotassw" (used 42 times in the NT!) means to *subject, bring under firm control, or subordinate*. "Hupo" (under) is found in our "hypo" (as in "hypodermic"); "tasso" (order, or structure) is found in our word "taxonomy." Our loving submission to Christ and to

one another takes structured form. It may help to think of putting a colon after "Christ" in verse 21: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ: "wives to your husbands" (and later—children to your parents; slaves to your masters). The "wives to husbands" is a continuation of the previous thought—"submitting" in v 21 is not repeated in v 22.

Here are biblical structures that include submission.

- Children (including Jesus! Lk 2:51) submit to their parents (Eph 6:1)
- Workers submit to their bosses (1 Pet 2:18)
- The church submits to Christ (Eph 5:24)
- We submit to the government (Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13; Tit 3:1)
- Christ submits to God and God Father is not submitted to Christ (1 Cor 15:27)
- The creation submits to Christ (Heb 2:8; Eph 1:22, etc.)
- We submit to appointed leaders in the church (1 Cor 16:15–16)
- God subjected creation to futility (Rom 8:20)
- Demons are subjected to the name of Jesus (Lk 10:17)

In the sense of role and authority, submission is not reciprocal. Parents are not to submit to their children. The church is not the head of Christ, nor is he in subjection to it.

Christian Submission is Not Coerced

Paul does not command the husband to make his wife submit. This is a horrible distortion, which some have abused. A Christian woman submits herself to her husband out of respect for Christ and with a desire to conform to the wisdom of God for her life.

***Ephesians 5:15:** "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."*

The New Testament demands something impossible: **Radical, Positive Obedience.**

Don't steal; but work; so you can be generous

Don't gossip; learn quietness; then use your words to encourage and build up

Don't be drunk; be filled with the Spirit; sing hymns and spiritual songs to encourage the church.

For marriage:

Don't rebel; submit; actively honor and please your husband

Will you do this all the time? No! Can God enable you to learn "active submission"? Yes, but it will never be perfect, so don't get discouraged!

The Mystery

Really, God? Submit to my husband in EVERYTHING?

Jan 30 our 47th anniversary. Marriage is still a mystery! What's more mysterious than how often we STILL miscommunicate is that God uses our flawed marriage, as he will use yours, to reveal his gospel in the context daily living.

We are intimidated by this passage: "submit to my husband as to you, Lord?";

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New Life Presbyterian Church

"It's humiliating to think I need my husband to purify me!";

"I've got to be 'without wrinkle'?"

"I've got an unbelieving husband. How can I submit to him?"

"My husband is caught in porn. He's not bathing me in the Word! How can I submit to him!?"

I do not have all the answers to these questions. It is not wrong to recognize your husband's sin, but your job is still to honor him and lift him up as best you can. We may not *follow our husbands into sin* and there comes a time in some marriages when separation and even divorce become inevitable. But if we start now to be in respectful submission *in the Lord*, we may avoid that bitter experience.

We can't generate love from our own hearts. It must be the Spirit of Christ in us.

What Does Submission Look Like?

- A woman is to honor and respect her husband (Eph 5:33; 1 Pet 3:2)
- She calls him "lord" (1 Pet 3:6) – not in the sense of "God."
- She loves him (Titus 2:4)
- She obeys him (1 Pet 3:6)
- She doesn't hold back her body from him (1 Cor 7:4)
- She loves their children and spends time in busy service to the household (1 Tim 5:10)
- She's not a busybody (1 Tim 5:13)
- She doesn't gossip or drink too much alcohol (1 Tim 5:13)
- She has a quiet and reverent spirit (Tit 2:3; 1 Pet 3:4; 1 Tim 2:12)
- She is eager to help in the church, to show hospitality and do all kinds of good works (1 Tim 5:10)

Got that? No problem, right? ☺

Expect it to be Hard

If you ask God to help you understand how to be in glad submission to your husband, and to fulfill these biblical instructions, he will teach you! The most crucial strategic battles are always the toughest! Don't be discouraged when you realize how stubborn your heart really is. All the more glory to God when he softens it! ☺ You may be surprised at the changes that occur in your marriage. And you will be even more surprised to discover that, miraculously, outsiders are seeing your marriage and learning about Jesus. You will also get "glory" from your husband and children. I recommend *Fierce Women*, Kimberly Wagner – very helpful.

Pray for Your Husband

I remember complaining to a dear friend about something that my husband was doing (or perhaps NOT doing). She heard me out and then asked me, "Rebecca, are you praying for him?" Duh. That is certainly the first thing we should do for our husbands, for we must not judge them, do not fully know their hearts and cannot change them.

Jesus, by His Spirit Will Help You

Prayer for our husbands, honesty in humility, knowing when to keep silent, asking the Lord to change our own hearts so we can love, respect and encourage our husbands with a full heart—these are things all wives can be doing, even if by baby steps. Remember that our Lord Jesus is our ultimate husband. We can find in him whatever lacks in our human husbands.

As we submit to our husbands, we are submitting to Christ. Ultimately, it is Jesus who washes you in *his* word, by the power of *his* Spirit working in your husband. Both of you together will be presented as the pure bride for our Heavenly Husband, when all our impurities of heart, mind and body will be gone and we will rejoice at a marriage feast that will show us all what our earthly marriages were meant to reflect. On that day, everyone is a bride, receiving the authority and intense personal love of Christ that surpasses the best of marriages!

Revelation 21:1-5 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

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¹ Ted Hamilton, "Creation Sexuality, or Sex as Prophecy," 2009 CWIPP Conference – The Sexual Body: Epicenter of the Worldview Battle, New Life Presbyterian Church, February 4, 2009.

² Baugh, 460.