

Ephesians 5:21-24 — What Does It Take For A Woman To Be A Great Wife?

May 11, 2014

Good morning CrossWinds. Happy Mother's Day. My name is Kurt and I serve as one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are in a series of studies on the book of Ephesians. It is a great book where God is challenging and stretching our understanding about how much he loves us. When we began the book, I had no idea how it would break apart and what week we would cover particular passages. As I approached Mother's Day, I realized we would hit the premier passage in the book of Ephesians about what it means to be a Godly wife on Mother's Day. It wasn't planned. I am not that good. It is simply the providence of God that we study this passage this morning.

In the weeks leading up to this morning, we studied living the Christian lifestyle. We don't live a Christian life so God will save us but a Christian lifestyle is one of the ways we express our thankfulness to God for having saved us. We looked at how we handle our money and our sexuality differently than the world around us. We looked at how we handle our anger, bitterness and disagreements different from others.

Today we come to the last quality Paul told us the Holy Spirit cultivates in our lives. It is an important and distinctive quality that is to be what Christians are known for. It is called submission.

...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)

When the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, he cultivates within us submission to one another in our lives. The Holy Spirit digs in the soil of our hearts and tears

out weeds of selfishness, ego, pride, arrogance and self-centeredness. In its place, the Holy Spirit plants within us a desire to humbly serve others like Christ served us.

The Holy Spirit builds within us a heart that doesn't want to live for ourselves and exercise our rights but we want to live for others so we can bless and support them.

When Christians say phrases like, "I have a right to this;" "You owe me" or "I will never budge because that is not what I want," most likely, that is not coming from the Holy Spirit working in their hearts. Those are not phrases that come from the submissive hearts God is shaping in us. He is shaping hearts within us that are other-centered. He is shaping a heart that desires to serve others, not insist on being served by others.

Paul said submitting to one another and not insisting on our rights, out of love for others, is one of the ways we see the Christian life in action. Paul gave us three practical examples of what submission looks like in everyday life: 1) The marriage relationship and submission between a husband and wife; 2) The family and submission between parent and children; 3) The business world and the relationship between employers and employees.

For the next two messages, we will look at marriage relationship. This week, we are only looking what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. Pastor Leland preaches next week for graduation. The following week we will examine how a husband is to love his wife.

This morning, as we look at what it means for a wife to submit to her husband, we will develop our thoughts under three headings: 1) The state of marriage; 2) What is the most important thing a woman can do to be a great wife; 3) The problems and pitfalls of submission.

Background on marriage

What is the state of marriage in our country?

The state of marriage in our country is not good. We always hear this but seldom do we get hard statistics. Here are some of the statistics I found in a book called The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller:

- The divorce rate today is twice what it was in the 1960s.
- Marriage is on the downswing. In 1960, 72 percent of American adults were married, today only 60 percent are married.
- Single parenting is on the upswing. In 1970, 89 percent of all births were to married adults, today only 60 percent of all births are to married adults.
- Cohabitation is skyrocketing. Half of all adults live together before marriage. In 1960, almost nobody did.
- If a woman is unmarried by her late 30s, there is a 60 percent chance she lived with a man for a period of time in her life.

Marriage in America is not in a good state. The institution of marriage is under attack. It is seen as an outdated institution. It is seen as a cultural relic from yesteryear that restricts sexual expression. Is marriage a relic that we can be discarded like our landlines now that we have cell phones?

What does the Bible say about marriage?

While marriage is practiced in our culture, the institution of marriage predates culture and will outlast all cultures. The Bible tells us marriage is an institution created by God, not the state. The Bible begins with a marriage in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and God officiated the wedding. The Bible ends with a marriage in the book of Revelation called the wedding supper of the lamb between Christ and his church.

Marriage is God's idea from first to last. What God institutes, he also regulates. By definition, there is no such thing as a marriage between two men or between two women because God, who created marriage, didn't define it that way. There may be a civil union by the state between two men and two women, but there is no such thing as a homosexual marriage where God is the one who officiates and God is the one who oversees and ordains the union. God created marriage and he created it for one man and one woman as a lifelong solitary commitment.

What is the great enemy of marriage?

The greatest enemy of marriage is selfishness. Marriage is not primarily about self-fulfillment. It is about self-denial. Biblical marriage is about denying yourself and serving your mate. It is not about your mate serving you. This is why the book of 1 Corinthians says sexual intimacy is not given to you to serve yourself. It is given to you to serve your spouse. Sexual intimacy is not only if you are in the mood but a husband and wife are to seek to serve one another sexually, regardless of their moods. It is about sacrificing your time, your energy,

your money and even your life to serve one another. Selfishness is the great destroyer of marriage.

Marriage is about nakedness. It is not just about physical nakedness, but it is about complete emotional nakedness. Marriage reveals your true character. In marriage you can't hide your selfishness. Your spouse sees you as you really are. In marriage, you give your spouse the right to see you as you really are. In marriage, you also give your spouse the right to help you refine your character by letting them point out the selfishness in your life that only they can see because only they are close enough to see.

It always cracks me up when people discover after a few years of marriage that they didn't marry the right person. Psychologists say the state of euphoria called being "in love" can only last a few months to a few years in any relationship. It is after the thrill of the chase wears off and the butterflies in our stomach go away that *everyone* wakes up to the realization that they didn't marry the right person. Everyone wakes up to the fact that the person they married is sinful and selfish, just like they are. In marriage, a husband and wife commit to lovingly telling the truth with each other and helping one another work through the selfishness in their characters.

It is tempting to look at successful people and be envious. If someone is successful in business, it is because he or she worked hard. If someone is successful on the athletic field, it is because he or she constantly practiced and worked hard. If someone has straight As, it is because he or she put in the time and effort to study at school. He or she worked hard.

Folks, everybody marries the wrong person. If you see a husband and wife who are happily married 20, 30 or 40 years into their marriage, the only reason they are happily married is because they put in the time and effort and worked hard at selflessly loving each other. They learned to submit and support their spouse's needs before their own needs. If they hadn't, they wouldn't still be married. Remember, by definition, everyone marries the wrong person.

I personally think a happily married couple after 30 years of marriage is a greater achievement than financial, athletic or academic success. The only way anyone gets there is doing the incredibly hard work of rooting out their selfishness. That hurts.

What does it take for a woman to be a great wife?

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Ephesians 5:22 (ESV)

I know this is weird. I am a male pastor talking to wives about submitting to their husbands. Some of you are thinking it would be best if a woman talked about this. Don't get hung up on my gender. The source of our authority is not the gender of the preacher, it is the Word of God. All I am doing is teaching the text, just like we do every weekend. The other thing to remember is the book of Ephesians has a lot more to say about the importance of men loving their wives than it does about women submitting to their husband. In two weeks, when we get to God's words for husbands, God has some strong, and important, words for men.

What does God mean when he tells a wife to submit to her husband?

A wife submitting to her husband sounds wrong. It sounds abusive or evil. That isn't the way the Bible describes it. All it means is when a woman becomes a wife in marriage, she voluntarily places herself under the leadership and authority of her husband. She voluntarily lets him lead in the marriage and she even encourages him to lead in their marriage. She doesn't try to replace him or berate him but she submits and supports his leadership. Submission is a wife letting her husband love her by leading her and taking care of her.

Who came up with the idea of submission?

Whenever I talk about this issue, I often hear women say that submission of a wife to a husband is cultural, not biblical. Today is a time of equal rights and equal times. Before you roll your eyes, the idea of a wife submitting to her husband and supporting her husband's leadership in their home is God's idea. A wife was given to Adam as his helpmate before the fall. God said he needed a helpmate. It was not good for him to be alone. A wife's submission to her husband's leadership in their marriage is not a product of the fall.

In every New Testament passage that addresses the role of the wife to the husband, it talks about the important of a wife submitting and supporting the leadership of her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-5).

Submission is not a husband's idea. It is also not a husband's duty to enforce the submission of his wife. There is no divine command for a husband to make his wife submit to him. If a husband is harsh with his wife, he is clearly in

sin. In two weeks, we will see that God commands husbands to be especially loving to their wives, not harsh with them. The command of a wife to submit to her husband's leadership comes straight from God to wives. If a wife doesn't want to submit to her husband's leadership in their marriage, she needs to take it up with God, who gave the command.

Are women to submit to all men?

No! A wife is only to submit to the leadership of her husband. The Bible doesn't say all women should submit to all men. That is not biblical.

Sometimes women, in a misplaced understanding of their role, submit to the leadership of other men in their lives when they shouldn't. Sometimes women allow themselves to be manipulated by men who are strong leaders. That is wrong. A wife is only required to submit and support the leadership of her husband.

Doesn't submission imply inferiority?

Submission does not mean inferiority. Husbands and wives are equal before the Lord. They are simply given different roles. It is like the left and the right hand. They are equal but have different roles. I am right handed, so my right hand does the leading but my left hand does the supporting. My left hand is the perfectly matched helper suitable for the leadership of my right hand. It is not inferior to my right hand.

When Cindy and I were first married, we lived in St. Joseph, Michigan, on the shore of Lake Michigan. There are some very wealthy people in the community. There are some amazing boats on the docks. We had a boat. A

man in our church sold jet boats. The company he worked for had an old four seater it used to race. The gel coat was full of cracks where the drivers body smashed into the side in a wreck. The company took the race engine out and put in a wimpy four cylinder that was barely enough to get the boat on plane. In kindness, they sold us the boat. We were very grateful.



I always thought it was funny on Sunday afternoons when we put our tiny boat in the water at the dock next to the huge boats. One Sunday afternoon, I was putting my boat in the water when a huge cigarette boat pulled up in



the ramp next to me. It was a beautiful. It had twin 1,000 horsepower Mercury engines with superchargers. It was a 55-foot long 150 mph boat. I looked it up online. It lists for \$1.1 million. It was quite a contrast next to my four-seater. I talked the the guy who owned the boat and learned how this beautiful race boat worked. It didn't take me long to realize his boat was much more biblical than mine.

In my boat, I ran everything. I controlled the steering and the throttle. All Cindy did was hold on to the side and scream. His boat took two people to drive. He ran the throttles on the engines. His wife steered the boat. They had a communication system in their



helmets. He had the leadership but they worked together to do together what they could not do alone. That was the only way for that high performance boat to operate.

I thought, “What a perfect picture of marriage and biblical marriage.”

Marriage doesn’t imply inferiority between a husband and wife. It is equality but a difference in roles. Someone needs to make the calls but a husband and wife work together.

Why are marital roles important?

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Ephesians 5:23–24 (ESV)

Marriage is a living, breathing picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. God created marriage as a living, breathing demonstration of the way we relate to Christ. The way we look to the leadership of Christ in our lives and the way we submit to the leadership of Christ in our lives is the way is paralleled by the way a wife should look to a husband’s leadership in their marriage.

This means marital roles are not arbitrary or reversible. Christ cannot wake up one morning and decide he will submit to the church. The church will not get up one day and decide it will lead Christ. The marital roles cannot be reversed. We find this in creation itself. In Genesis 2:20, we learn the wife was created to be a helpmate for her husband. A wife was not given to a husband to be a helpless mate. A wife was created to be her husband’s help mate.

What if you married up? What if you married a super-gifted and talented woman? Great! You have a wonderful advisor, but you are still in charge. In God's eyes, the husband is always the buck-stops-here man in the home.

Does this mean a wife can't work outside the home? No. Next week we will see it is a husband's job to be the leader and provider of his family so he should strive to put his family in a position where his wife doesn't have to work because her job as a wife and mother is full-time responsibility in itself. That doesn't mean a wife can't work. A wife has three roles. She is a wife to her husband, and she is the only one who can do that. She is a mother to a children, and she is the only one who can do that. She can also work outside of the home but her husband should do the best he can to free her up so she can do the things that only she can do, being a wife and mother. Dutch marriage is not biblical.

In what areas of life should a wife submit to her husband?

...wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Ephesians 5:24 (ESV)

This means a wife doesn't just submit to her husband's leadership at home but her career is under her husband's leadership. Her career is not her career. It is her family's and under the leadership of her husband. When Cindy and I married, it was hard for Cindy to give up her work. She worked from age 14 until two years after we were married. We made the decision that when she became a mom, she would be at home with her children and we would downsize to whatever extent necessary for her to be at home. So far, we are still alive. God has provided.

I realize there are some incredibly gifted women who can work, be a supportive wife for her husband and be a great mother to her children. Those women are rare. Most women cannot handle a career, serving as a wife and loving children as a mother all at the same time. A husband should not insist his wife do all three.

Submitting to a husband's leadership also means a husband and wife do not have separate checking accounts with money he can't touch. I have seen this too many times. A wife keeps her own cash and does her own taxes. She is resisting going together with her husband in everything.

This does not mean a wife should submit to her husband's leadership if he is leading in sin. In the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts, Sapphira agreed to lie with her husband and she paid for it. She should not have followed his leadership into sin.

A wife's submission to the leadership of her husband means a husband is responsible to restore a broken relationship with his wife.

Since the marriage relationship parallels the relationship between Christ and the church, that instructs us on resolving marital conflict. Jesus is the pursuer. Jesus didn't sit back and wait for us to pursue him in the breakdown of the relationship between God and man. He pursued us. He went out of his way and loved us. In the same way, a husband is to go out of his way and pursue his wife when there is a relational breakdown. Jesus relentlessly and tirelessly pursues us, in the same way that husbands are to relentlessly and tirelessly pursue their wives when things fall apart.

When you are in a marital standoff, the husband is to be the one to make the first move, just as Jesus was the one who made the first move to free us from our sin. This also means that a husband needs to be the one to make the sacrifice to restore a broken marital relationship as Jesus was the one who made the sacrifice to restore our broken relationship with God.

This also means that husbands are responsible for things that are not necessarily their fault. Just as Jesus took responsibility for our sin and paid the price of our sin, a husband takes responsibility for his wife's sin and pays the price to free her from the consequences of her sin. Husbands can't say to their wives, "You made the mess, you clean it up." If your wife comes home with a speeding ticket, the husband is the one who, out of love, pays it. A husband takes it upon himself to willingly suffer for his wife, and if necessary, die for her.

What are the problems and pitfalls of a wife's submission?

Why is submission to my husband hard?

The reason a wife's submission to her husband is hard is because of sin. It is sin in a woman's heart that makes submission hard, just like it is the sin in a man's heart that loving sacrifice for his wife hard.

Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

The word desire doesn't mean attraction. It literally means *desire for your husband's position of authority*. As a product of sin, a wife's natural sinful inclination will be to not submit and support her husband's leadership but to challenge and undermine his leadership. Sin twists marital roles. Sin transforms a husband from a lover to an abuser. It transforms a wife from a submitter and

supporter to an underminer and challenger. When the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts, he pulls us back from sinful roles and helps us assume the roles God originally gave us. The Holy Spirit restores a wife to her role as her husband's helper.

What if my husband isn't worthy of my respect?

This is a good question. Some wives have husbands that don't love Jesus. Some wives have men that act like boys. By all rights, these husbands don't deserve a wife's submission because they aren't good leaders. What should we do?

One of the lengthier New Testament passages on a wife's submission to her husband is found in 1 Peter 3. Let's look at what Peter said because he anticipated and answered this very question.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1–2 (ESV)

A wife is to submit to her husband even if he isn't deserving of respect. A wife is to change her husband's heart not by yelling, not by whining but by her respectful and pure conduct as she submits herself to her husband's leadership in her marriage.

There is incredible power in a wife's submission and respect of her husband. Every husband longs for a wife that looks at him as her hero, her protector. Men will die for that woman. A husband will lay down his life for a wife who loves and respect him. If a husband's life is a mess, if his wife believes in

him, submits to him and looks for his leadership in their marriage, he will right his life and sail his ship because his wife believes in him.

Criticizing a husband, undermining his leadership, berating him and making your home a war zone instead of a safe haven will discourage a husband's leadership. That is not the way to change him.

How can a wife change her husband's heart?

In the ancient world, women were fascinated with their appearances, cosmetics and clothing much like they are today. Ephesians was written in a time when traditional marital roles were in a state of flux. Men traditionally kept a wife like she was a slave or piece of property. At this time in Roman history, there was a strong women's liberation movement. Married women typically wore a veil in public to show they were married, similar to women wearing a wedding ring today. In the women's liberation movement that was sweeping across the ancient world, women were going without their veils. They were dressing provocatively. The skirts were getting shorter and the neck lines getting deeper. They wore jewelry and cosmetics. Ancient versions of contraception and abortion were commonplace. This women's liberation movement was such a problem that Caesar Augustus enacted a new set of marriage laws attempting to curb the promiscuity of Roman women and strengthen the family.

It is to this background of the liberated women, that placed an increasing emphasis on beauty and their ability to get the attention of men through their looks that Paul wrote these words.

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden

person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:3–4 (ESV)

Some translations translate the first phrase as “do not let your adorning be *merely* external.” I like that translation a little better. It is not saying a woman should not care for her looks. This is not a pro-bag lady verse. It is important to brush and floss. A bath is greatly appreciated.

Peter was taking what is a natural interest for women, which is their looks, and saying that real beauty is not found from a Mary Kay bottle. Real beauty is found in a woman's spirit. It is a beauty that doesn't fade. It is the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. It is the beauty of a woman who submits and supports her husband's leadership. Real feminine beauty is a wife submitting to her husband and delighting in being his helpmate for the glory of God.

Ladies, if you want your husband to be attracted to you so he can't take his eyes off you, more powerful than a mini-skirt is a submissive and gentle spirit that looks to your husband and your protector, provider and leader.

Conclusion - Sarah the Supermodel

If you are like most women reading Peter's words, your first reaction is to disbelieve this is true. Submission is beautiful? Submission is attractive? We think of submission as weakness. That isn't true. Peter gave us the example of Sarah from the Old Testament to challenge our thinking.

Sarah was Abraham's wife. She was known for a few qualities. One of them was she never had a child until she was very, very old. The other thing that leaps off the pages of Scripture is she was beautiful. Stunningly beautiful.

People would literally kill to get a woman of her beauty as their wife. In Genesis

12, when Abraham went down to Egypt, he asked Sarah to lie and say she was his sister, not his wife, because he was afraid somebody would try to kill him to take her. When Sarah, the super model, showed up in Egypt she was the talk of the town because she was a very beautiful woman.

The Bible doesn't condone what Abraham did, it is simply pointing out that Sarah was drop-dead gorgeous.

What made Sarah especially attractive was not just the stunning appearance on the outside but the gentle and submissive heart she had toward her husband on the inside. She called him her, "Lord." She called him her master. Her heart was all about submitting and supporting Abraham. Her physical beauty caught the eyes of many men but it was her gentle and submissive spirit that kept her husband's eye.

Women, as we look at what is the one thing you can do that will make your marriage a raging success, it is submitting and supporting your husband's leadership in your home. It is respecting your husband and believing in him. It is being his helpmate not detractor. Remember that sin twists your marital role tempting you to undermine your husband but Jesus wants to restore your role. Marriage roles are not arbitrary. They are not reversible. They mirror Christ's relationship to the church. God created it that way.

Two weeks from now, when we return to the book of Ephesians, we will study the most important thing a man can do to succeed as a husband. You don't want to miss that week. If a wife takes to heart her role of submission and support that we talked about this morning and her husband take on his God-

given role of lavishly loving his wife, I guarantee you that every marriage can be transformed into something great.

I will see you in two weeks.



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