

# The Pattern of Marriage (Wives)

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles with you, and I hope that you do, open up to the book of Ephesians chapter 5. We are in the middle of a short five-week series on marriage.

Now, in case you're visiting with us, you do need to know that normally I preach through books of the Bible, verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, and we have been doing that in the Gospel of Mark since January.

So from January up through July, we were in the Gospel of Mark. And so we got about halfway through Mark and decided to take a break for August and September.

And then we're coming back to Mark actually in the middle of September. We'll be coming back to the Gospel of Mark. But this morning we're in Ephesians 5. We're going to spend these five weeks on marriage primarily in this chapter trying to understand what the Apostle Paul, what the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is teaching us about marriage.

So we're going to read verses 22 through 33, and I'm going to ask you guys to stand with me in honor of God's Word. Ephesians 5, beginning in verse 22.

[1:06] Paul writes, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. 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. Husbands, love your wives as 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.

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.

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. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Oh, Father, take Your Word now by Your Spirit and apply it to our hearts.

[2:32] We ask in Christ's name. Amen. You'll be seated. We are really walking through this text in sort of a backwards kind of way.

Now, we started off on the right foot, I guess. The first week in our series, we backed all the way up to verse 15 in Ephesians chapter 5, so that we could see the broader context in which Paul gives these instructions about marriage.

And the broader context that we were able to see was that of people who are being sanctified by God's Holy Spirit, people who are being made holy by His work within us, people who are, the Apostle Paul says, filled with the Spirit.

And so a couple of weeks ago, as we began this series, I said to you what I think is the most important thing that I can say in this whole series on marriage, and that is that the problem with our marriages is that we are fallen, sinful people, and what we need more than good marriages, what we need in order for us to have marriages that meet the standards and the criteria that God Himself sets up.

What we need is to be redeemed ourselves. And if we come at marriage without the blood of Christ covering our sins, without the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us and enabling us and empowering us to do the things that the Apostle Paul tells us we're supposed to do in marriage, then we're going to fail at it.

[ 3 : 53 ] We may stay married for 40 years or 50 years or 60 years, but we won't succeed in the ways that God has in mind, and we won't meet God's original intention for marriage in creation.

Now, that being said, last week we began to walk through these verses by starting at the end, by looking at the ultimate goal of marriage and what marriage is really ultimately about from verses 31 and 32.

And what we said is that God has designed marriage, He has created marriage to be a reflection of the relationship that Jesus has with His bride, the church, so that our marriages are successful in God's view to the degree that we put on display for the world the glory of Christ in our marriages. He is honored in our marriages, He is glorified in our marriages, and He is pleased by what we do in marriage when we follow the pattern that He has set up here so that we become a reflection of His relationship with His bride, the church.

And so now this week, we're going to step back a few more verses to verse 25, and we're going to focus on verses 25 through 29, and we're going to look at this pattern of marriage that has been set up here in Ephesians chapter 5 by looking at husbands first, and then next week, we'll go to the beginning of the passage in verse 22, and we'll begin to focus upon the role that wives have in marriage.

[ 5 : 23 ] Now one of the things that we realize very quickly, even as without me commenting at all, without me preaching any sort of sermon, all we would have to do is read the words that we just read, and we would realize very quickly that this vision of marriage presented here is very counter-cultural today.

It goes against the grain of our society. Now in particular, what is counter-cultural about this passage today is primarily what Paul has to say to wives about submitting to husbands, which we will deal with next week.

But if you were reading this letter 2,000 years ago, when the Apostle Paul originally penned it, what would have seemed very counter-cultural to you at that time would have been his instructions to husbands.

In fact, you would have probably thought that he didn't go far enough in his instructions to wives because Paul does not, as some people would claim, Paul does not take upon himself the patriarchal, misogynist view of the world around him in which women were downgraded and treated as less than men.

He doesn't do that at all in this passage, and the Scriptures don't do that at all. So they would have thought, maybe you haven't gone far enough with women, but when they read his instructions to husbands, they would have thought that Paul had sort of lost it.

[ 6 : 42 ] Why would you require men to do these kinds of things? Because men in this world didn't do these kinds of things. They were the masters of their own kingdoms, and they did whatever they wanted, and they treated those around them any way that they wanted to treat them.

And Paul comes in, and he does away with that approach to marriage, that approach to life, that approach to relationships in general. And so this passage is counter-cultural, I think, in every age. Different aspects of it at different times are going to seem and feel counter-cultural. But I think underneath that, and the reason that it feels this way in all times to all people is because it's not simply counter-cultural.

It's counter-fallen sinful nature. It is against our natures to act toward one another in the ways in which we're told to act in this passage.

So what we're primarily seeing here is not a revolution in terms of how marriage is conducted just because of our culture. What we're seeing is a revolution in how we treat one another because our sinful hearts would not naturally respond in these ways.

[ 7 : 53 ] In fact, when we started this series, we talked a little bit. We just briefly talked about the roles of men and women in the first week. And I reminded you of something that happened during the shooting at the Batman movie that occurred just back in July.

And I reminded you of the men that we learned about subsequent to that who had... They dove and covered their girlfriends and they protected them from the fire. And those men died in that event. And yet their girlfriends were saved. There were three separate men who were willing to lay down their lives for the women that they loved. And we read here in this passage that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

And what I told you two weeks ago is that there is sort of hardwired into men this desire to protect and preserve the lives of the women that they love.

Now, we don't all at all times live up to that hardware desire that is in us. No doubt there were probably men who rushed out of that theater without giving a thought to the women who were there with them.

[ 9 : 04 ] But when we're at our best and when we're acting upon our God-given masculine desires, what men will naturally do is protect the women that they care about and that are near them.

But what I want to say to you this morning is that what God requires of us as husbands is far more than reacting to that basic, natural, masculine desire within us.

I don't think that what he's saying is, well, Christ died for His bride, so if there's ever a chance that you might have to lay down your life and physically throw yourself in front of the bullet for your wife, then you need to do that.

I don't think that's at all what Paul is telling us to do. Because he begins not by encouraging us to be masculine, manly men and stand up.

He begins by telling us, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

[ 10 : 05 ] He begins with a very simple command to love our wives. Notice that he does not say, men, make every effort to lead your wives.

Now that's involved, that's tied together with this, but that's not the command that he gives. He doesn't say, men, make sure that you protect your wives and your family. That's not the primary thing.

It flows out of this love, it's a consequence of this love, but it's not the main thing. And if we were saddled with describing what's the main role of a man, of a husband, we would describe it in those kinds of ways, but that's not where he begins.

He begins with love. When he calls husbands the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, we know that that has to do with leadership. The attempt to remove leadership from this passage, which some have done, twists the text.

Every one of us reads that and we see the head of the wife. We know that that's leadership, but leadership is defined here in terms of love. Love your wives.

[ 11 : 10 ] But what exactly does that mean? What exactly does that entail? We can get a better picture of what that means if we look at a couple of other very similar passages in the New Testament that are addressed first to wives and then to husbands just the way that this portion of Ephesians is.

So I want you to turn over to the book of Colossians, which is not far. Colossians chapter 3, also written by the Apostle Paul, says something very, very similar to what we're reading here, although in abbreviated form.

And it gives us a clue, a hint as to what Paul means when he tells us to love our wives. Colossians 3, if you look in verse 18, it sounds very similar to Ephesians 5.

Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. And now verse 19, he addresses husbands. Husbands, love your wives. It's the same command. But he adds something here.

He adds a second command that I think sheds light upon the first command to love. He says, and do not, my translation says, and do not be harsh with them.

[ 12 : 18 ] Literally what it says is, do not embitter them. Do not make them bitter. Well now there's a, that helps us to better understand what a husband's leadership in the home is to be like and what this love is to look like.

If in your home, by your actions and by your words, you are constantly making your wife bitter and driving a wedge of bitterness between the two of you, then you're not doing it correctly.

We're not supposed to speak to our wives or treat our wives in a way that would encourage them or move them towards frustration with us. So, men who come and bark orders at their wives are not leading as the apostle intends us to lead.

Men who come and expect everything to be done for them at a particular time and in a particular way are not leading in the way that we're intended to lead. Those sorts of things make a person bitter.

They make a person angry. So the first thing we need to say about this love is it is not a demanding kind of love. It is not a love that comes in and asserts its own way.

[ 13 : 27 ] It's a love that in every way is sensitive to the feelings and the thoughts of the other person and wants to make sure that in what I do I don't leave an opening for bitterness to begin to creep in.

There's another passage in the book of 1 Peter. If you'll turn over there. This passage is not written by the apostle Paul but it follows this same pattern of instructions to wives and instructions to husbands.

And so I think that it's helpful for us as well. In 1 Peter 3 verse 1 again we see the command to wives. It says, Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands.

Alright? So that's the command to wives. And then he elaborates on that and if you move down to verse 7 we get the instruction to husbands. It says, Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Now here the apostle Paul doesn't tell us to love. He tells us to live with our wives in a certain way. And he tells us specifically that we are supposed, my translation says that we are to live in an understanding way.

[ 14 : 46 ] It is in a way that accords with knowledge. According to knowledge is what Peter says here. So I don't think that what Peter is saying, although we would want to do this, he's not saying live in such a way so that you're understanding toward your wife.

That's not what he's saying although that's a good thing. What he's saying is live in such a way that is according to the knowledge that God has revealed to us in His Word. And what sort of knowledge, what sort of theology has God given to us that would help us in our marriages?

Well here it is. Peter gives us, he begins to lay it out for us. Alright? He says, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. Weaker in what way?

Certainly not intellectually. The scriptures never indicate that there's any intellectual difference between men and women and we all know from experience that that's not at all the case. Certainly not emotionally.

We wouldn't want to say that women are emotionally weaker. They may experience emotions in a different way but not emotionally weaker. I think that you could make a case that Peter's point here is that women on the whole are physically weaker than men and that's true.

[ 15 : 56 ] I mean you can always find the muscle bound woman who can out arm wrestle most of the men that she knows but that's the exception that sort of proves the rule. Alright? I bet if husbands and wives were all to arm wrestle here today I bet we'd be heavily favored for the men, right?

I would just guess. So it's entirely possible that Peter is saying honor your wives understanding that they're physically weaker than you but I don't quite think that's it. I think that what he's saying is that they are required by the theology of marriage that the Bible puts forth from Genesis chapter 2 onward that women are required to place themselves in a submissive position and because of that they are willingly placing themselves in a place of lesser power than men and if men abuse that we're doing the wrong thing we're not living according to the knowledge that God has given us about how marriage is to be conducted.

So he says don't do that understand that yes she's required to submit to you that puts her in a position in terms of authority in a weaker position she's the weaker vessel but don't use that don't turn that back on her instead honor her honor her as the one who's willing to do that I don't know very many men who are very good at placing themselves in the weaker position the position of less authority we all sort of bristle against the police officer when he's walking up to our car when we've been busted for speeding or having a sticker that's expired and we're all kind of frustrated and we want to tell him what we think but we don't because we're scared but I don't know anybody who doesn't want to do that and so it requires some discipline to place yourself under the authority of another and men are reminded here husbands honor your wife for that honor her for that and then he helps us to better understand what this means when he says since they are heirs with you of the grace of life husbands and wives are if they are both believers they are co-heirs of the grace of life which means that there's not a way of salvation for men and a separate way of salvation for women there's one way of salvation and we all obtain the same inheritance there is no difference we are of equal value and equal worth and we are saved in the same way through the same blood and we receive the same spiritual inheritance and if you're going to love your wife the way that the scriptures require us to love our wives we have got to see them that way we have got to look at our

wives and see a co-heir of grace understand that so when we come back to Ephesians chapter 5 with all that information in mind there's a lot packed into this little command husbands love your wives it means to honor them because of their willingness to put themselves in submission it means to view them as a co-heir with Christ headed toward the same goal that you're headed towards and it means to treat them and behave towards them in such a way at all times that you would not leave an opening for bitterness and frustration and anger to creep in all of that

I think is contained in the phrase husbands love your wives that's the command that's what we are supposed to do and then Paul goes on and he tells us what the goal of that particular kind of love is notice he tells us why Christ gave himself up for the church in verse 26 here's the goal 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 understand the goal of a husband in his marriage is to see his wife become more holy that's the goal in all that we do the goal of Christ in dying upon the cross for us was not merely the forgiveness of our sins now

I know I'm on dangerous territory when I say merely the forgiveness of sins because that's huge okay but it's more than that is what I want you to see it's more than the forgiveness of sins it's more than a right standing before God that's huge there's nothing greater than the doctrine of justification by faith alone that through faith in Jesus not only are our sins removed but his righteousness covers us and we stand before him fully righteous in the sight of his father but he wants more for us than just a right standing he wants within our hearts and within our lives he wants real practical righteousness to flow out and he is at work doing that through the power of his spirit in every believer he is sanctifying us he is making us holy and that is tied to the death of Jesus he gave himself up for the church that he might sanctify her immediately the verse that comes to my mind is in Romans chapter 8 where we have been predestined what?

[ 21 : 24 ] to be conformed to the image of his son predestined for holiness for Christ likeness that's what God is working in us that's what Christ is working in the church so what is a husband supposed to do?

what is his goal for his marriage? his goal is the same as Christ's that he might sanctify his wife that he might see his wife become more and more holy more and more righteous it is not your it's not your goal as a husband to convince your wife to obey Paul's command to submit and I quite frankly I think that husbands who repeat that command to their wives are just being foolish and they're focusing on the wrong thing the thing to focus on is holiness and that will come because that's a product of growing in grace that's a product of sanctification but the aim of a husband the aim of a man of God in the life of his wife is to see her become more holy so the command is to love our wives in a very particular way and the goal of that love is to see our wives become more holy now how do we do that?

that's key and he answers that question here he tells us the means by which we can help our wives become more holy now it's honestly not really clear in the way that most English translations translate this verse because when we read it this is what we read in verse 26 that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word and you see how that if you pay attention to that most of you are probably not grammar people I'm a grammar person I like to follow the phrases in here it sounds as if what he's saying is that Christ is presently sanctifying the church he's presently making the church holy because he already cleansed her with the washing of the word see what it says having cleansed or having already cleansed it sounds like in the present he's sanctifying in the past he cleansed her with the word which is good theology okay that's good theology but it's just not what the text says I don't think I don't think that that's what he's telling us I think if we were to translate it a little more literally here's what we would get it would be something like this that he might sanctify her cleansing her by the washing of water with the word okay so these things are happening at the same time so that this the cleansing is the means by which the sanctifying happens so let me give you my paraphrase husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water with the word you see it a little bit more clearly there the way in which a husband is to go about increasing the holiness of his wife is through the cleansing power of the word at work in marriage this is a husband's tool in his marriage a husband's primary tool in marriage is not a self-help book alright it's not a program or course on how to make your wife happy it's not cleaning up your finances it's not learning to communicate better that's all good stuff but that's not

the primary method and means that a husband is to use to reach the goals that Christ has set forth for marriage the primary tool that we have is this book right here we are sanctified the people of God are sanctified only in so much as the word of God comes into their hearts and begins to transform them which is why we spend so much time in the word here that's why we don't just sing songs in the first half of our worship service we read scripture in the middle of singing songs and we try to start with reading scripture and we stand as we read the scripture before we begin to meditate on the word because one of our convictions is that

God does all that he does and the spirit works the things that he works in our lives through this book through the word of God and if our marriages are to be successful and if husbands if our wives are to become more holy our task and our job is to bring this word to bear in our homes now there are good ways to do that and there are bad ways to do that the bad way to do that is to quote the bible to your wife all the time every time you feel like she's gone off the tracks well you know it says here that's a bad way to do it you should know that so how do we use the word practically let's break this down into something that you can take home with you what do you do well I make a couple of suggestions here that I think are the primary ways in which the word works in our lives and in our marriages number one is that we need to on a regular basis we need to be opening up the bible together reading it together studying it together alright there is something wrong

[ 26 : 50 ] I think with our over emphasis on the idea of having a private devotional and a private quiet time that's an over emphasis alright we all want to spend time alone in the word and studying the word and alone in prayer and that's important for our spiritual growth but if we over emphasize that we will think that our most important times in the word of God are when we're alone but sometimes the most important time that we spend in the word of God is when we spend it with other people and husband and wife need to be spending time together in the word that is the primary reason why in our small groups this go round I decided to have the men and the women do the same study alright it wasn't to save money so we didn't have to buy two studies alright it wasn't anything like that it was so that men could come home and women could come home and we could do the daily readings together so that we could open up that workbook together and read the scriptures it tells us to read together and answer the questions about the scriptures together as husband and wife for practical reasons we have our small groups separately because somebody's got to watch our kids right while we're meeting a lot of us have little kids so for practical reasons we meet separately but I wanted to enable you and encourage you to come back together and be looking at the same things you walk through your week even if you don't find yourself able to do it every day at least once or twice a week opening to the same page and the same workbook and reading the same scriptures and answering the same questions together that's a little tool that I tried to give you to help you with accomplishing this but whether or not we're doing the same bible study together whether or not we're having the same small group topic is irrelevant in the long run because we need to build into our marriages the discipline of opening the bible up together and reading it together that's the first way in which I think the word begins to work in our marriages the second way is just as intentional but it's not as planned alright it's intentional but it's not planned we need to have the bible bubble up in our conversations as husband and wife we need to have the scriptures surface when we're talking about what to do here and what to do there or sometimes it is very healthy for a husband and wife to just sit and ponder the bible together you know just a you're having a conversation and you say well what you know

I was thinking about this bible verse as you're driving down the road or you're dealing with a situation with your kids or your grandkids and you're wondering how should what should be our involvement in that what should be our role in that and the two of you to begin to think through some scriptures that might apply the word should just begin to sort of bubble up in your conversations it's not that every conversation you have needs to turn into a bible study it just means that your everyday talk needs to be flavored by the word and even when you're not quoting chapter and verse and sitting down and opening it at a table you need to have biblical phraseology and biblical words and biblical thinking just sort of come out and you begin to sharpen one another and help each other see things that you didn't see before and husbands have to lead in that men have to take the first step in that our goal in all that we do as husbands is for our wives to become more holy and the only means by which that is going to happen is through the power of his word at work in our homes so that's the that's the goal and that's the means but there's something even even further than that we could call it the ultimate goal but we'll call it the purpose of all of this and we see

the purpose of all of this in the following verses where he says in verse 27 that Christ's goal for the church his purpose for the church is 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 understand that all of us will stand before

Christ on judgment day there is not a person on the face of the earth that will not stand before him will all stand will all be presented before him and if as a husband you want to be daily reminded of of your your role in marriage daily remind yourself that your wife the woman that you love that you have committed your whole heart to she will stand before the judge of all the earth and account for how she's lived how will she stand on that day Christ is working with his omnipotent power to ensure that we all stand before him holy and blameless on that day but what are we doing as husbands to ensure that our wives stand before Christ not just clothed in his righteousness that will gain us entrance into eternity but stand before him with a practical kind of holiness well there will come on that day when he will when he will remove from us all sinful desires and he will cleanse us from every bit of evil that still hides away in our hearts but how much cleansing will he have to do on that day for each of us how much of a gap will there be between our present holiness on that day and the ultimate holiness of glorification that he will bestow upon us on judgment how much of a gap is there going to be as a husband our job for our wives is to shrink that gap so that after she's lived her life and she stands before Christ there will be very little work for him to do in order to make her stand spotless blameless before him in all that we're doing in our marriages as husbands as wives our goal is that on that day because of the way that we've lived our lives together Christ will be greatly honored and glorified all of this all of it is ultimately about him and the spread of his fame and the reflection of his glory into the world and what we have to ask ourselves is how how are we contributing to that in our marriages it is of course impossible to contribute to that if we don't begin with where we began and that is with redemption you can't do these things unless the spirit of Christ dwells in you and the spirit of Christ will not dwell in you if Christ is not your savior so the first thing that I would ask you this morning is is he your savior is he your redeemer or is he or is he just someone that you acknowledge intellectually and you agree with what the Bible has to say about him or do you know him as your savior have you trusted in him with your whole heart have you turned from sin and turned to him and do you cling to him as your treasure that's what biblical faith is treasuring Christ for all that he is and all that he has done for us have you have you done that and then secondly for the men what is it that you can do what is it that you're not doing and what is it that you can do to help your wife become more holy it may be very simple it may be just that you need to that you need to begin to just you don't you never open the Bible together you don't pray together you don't and maybe this week as awkward as uncomfortable as it might be for you maybe just the simple thing that you need to do is say honey let's sit down at the table and read a couple of verses and pray for two minutes that's it not you don't have to climb some lofty mountain here just read a couple of verses pray for a couple of minutes and just try to start it just try to get it going what are you not doing what can you do as a husband to begin this process of getting the word central in your marriage and then I would ask

I would ask the wives I know for you ladies this has not been the most exciting sermon I get that okay not a lot's been directed at you you're coming next week alright but there are things that you can do there are practical things that you can do to make this easier for your husband there really are because this is not easy for husbands we are we are sinful people and we know it and we know that we shouldn't feel uncomfortable when it comes to praying with our wives but sometimes we do okay there should be no sense of dis-ease at that point but sometimes there is and the things that a wife can do to make that easier to make it don't make it obvious don't beg him to do just allow and make it easy for him to begin to do that don't make it a show oh finally you're going to do that I've been waiting don't do that you say okay you see what I'm saying here what can you do as a wife think through what things are you doing that may make it more uncomfortable and more difficult for him to begin to lead in this kind of

[ 36 : 29 ] Christ honoring godly way let's pray you do not often call us to do easy things things that you call us to do are difficult because we're not who we ought to be yet and we need more of the power of your spirit flowing through us and we need more of your word changing us and transforming us and helping us to become the people that you want us to be so we know we sense and we feel that this will not be easy and we will all fail at this probably before we turn out the light tonight and so what I'm asking you to do for us father is to place your mercy and your grace at the forefront of our minds so that we would never give up so that we would not become discouraged but

that we would take heart that your mercy covers our failures that your grace enables us to try again help us not to be people who simply want to order our houses properly but help us to be people who want to honor

Jesus in every aspect of our lives including our homes it's in his name that we pray amen