

Well, we're going to have some fun today. You can say a lot about us as a church, but one thing you can't say is that we don't preach the tough texts. This is a tough text. Not especially in understanding what it's saying. There is a lot of discussion as to what Paul means here in places, but the difficulty lies in living this out. It's like your parents used to say: you don't have to like eating your vegetables, but you have to eat them. Well, we're going to eat a couple of helpings of veg today - together. But, rest assured, we'll leave here in hope of a better tomorrow.

Ephesians 5 is a text about building super marriages. When I say super I really mean supernatural. Christian marriage, which is what Paul addresses here, is supernatural. We're going to look at the commands in this text and your natural reaction is going to be to laugh. Seriously. Have you read what this text says? Give me a break. You mean God wants me to submit to that man? God wants me to love and serve her? Regardless of their response? It's laughable. You're going to see this stuff in here and think, "there's no way I can do that!" And you're right. Marriage is supernatural. You can't do it right without Christ. Let me frame it in a more positive way. You can do it with Christ.

[CONTEXT]

We can't begin this text until we look back at the context, particularly beginning with verse **18** but especially v. **21**. The banner over this whole section is this idea of being controlled by the Holy Spirit. What does a life look like that is fueled by the Spirit? Last week we saw 5 things, the last of which was this idea of submitting. This is the banner, and it doesn't stop here. Paul's discussion of life controlled by the Spirit hasn't ended, it only becomes more narrowly focused as he applies it in the marriage context.

If that's true, then, in some way, the relationship within the marriage (despite the presence of differing roles) mirrors that within the church as it relates to submission. I don't think this idea of mutual surrender is inconsistent with the roles that Paul will talk about in this text. So I'll argue that what you'll see is that the mark of a marriage controlled by the HS is this idea of mutual submission within the confines of differing roles. Let me say that again. The mark of a marriage fueled by the Spirit is this sense in which each person willingly puts aside something of himself or herself - some aspect of his or her will - for the sake of the other. What Paul moves to in this section is how this service and surrender look different when viewed through the distinct roles put in place by God. Let's look at this section as we think about how to build super marriages.

I. Wives submit as to the Lord (v. 22-24) [READ]

First to the wives. Wives here are commanded to submit to their own husbands (not to every man) as to the Lord. If submission is already in play, why does Paul repeat it for the wife? Well let me unpack *two reasons*.

A. There is a God-ordained structure of roles in the home because of what the husband/wife relationship expresses to the watching world.

1. God has ordained roles in the marriage that go back to creation, not the Fall.

a. Mystery visited early

First, because within the home, there is a God-ordained structure of authority that differs from the larger community because of what the husband-wife relationship expresses. The headship that Paul reiterates here is a reflection of God's original intent in creation. Headship and submission in marriage are not products of the Fall. They seem to be implied in the creation order. They were corrupted in the Fall. So women usurp and men abuse. Not to get ahead of myself, but this is the mystery that Paul unveils in verse **32**. In Genesis 2 when God speaks of the oneness to be experienced in human marriage, He knows, even before the fact, that this oneness will be a picture of the way Christ and the Church experience oneness. That the way the wife submits to her husband as the husband sacrificially surrenders to his wife is a picture of how Christ and the Church will relate to one another - the Church gladly following after her authority and Head. Moses didn't get this, but God had it in mind all along. That is the mystery that once was hidden but is now revealed.

b. **source or authority or something else? (v. 23)**

This is what Paul says in **verse 23** [**“For”**]. The reason the wife submits to her husband is because God has put the husband out front in the marriage relationship. Now there is a lot of discussion as to what this word “head” means. There are two main ways of understanding this word. The first option is to take the word to mean “source.” So the wife is derived from the husband as Eve was derived from Adam as the Church is derived from Christ. In this view, there is no line of authority implied by Paul. The second popular option is to see “head” as “authority.” So headship implies leadership. In this view, obviously, there is a line of authority present. Now, understand, there are godly people on both sides of this debate, but I don’t see “source” in the context if it is devoid of authority. In fact, I think even source implies authority. So I think headship, here, carries the weight of authority. Simply considering the example of Christ, headship involves leadership. I think it’s helpful to think of it in terms of “prominence” (from Latin ‘jutting out’). So Paul is arguing that the wife is to submit because the husband has been given the prominent role in the relationship. He is out front by God’s design. So that if the family is pictured as an army unit moving forward to an objective, the husband is out front clearing the way. This is consistent with how XC treats His bride.

This does not diminish the dignity of the woman, it merely means that the husband and wife function in different ways in the home. Paul argues in Galatians 3 that our personhood in Christ is equal. There’s no second-string. We see this in the Trinity: singular worth and essence - one God. Diverse roles within persons (Spirit comes under in serving the Son and the Son comes under the Father in doing His will). So Paul isn’t suggesting that the woman is inferior, but that she occupies a different role. It could mean that the husband is in some way answerable to God for what happens in the family (as church leaders are answerable for the church). Not the husband has the *sole* responsibility, but that he has the *primary* responsibility. It could mean that the husband is the initiator and the wife the responder (as Christ and the Church). Again, I think it is tied to the fact that the marriage relationship is a symbol of the way Christ and the Church relate to one another. In any case, I can’t help but see a line of authority in Paul’s argument.

So Paul instructs wives to come under and support the headship of their husbands in a different way than they submit in the community because of what the marriage symbolizes.

2. **This is easy to neglect in the home**
 - a. **hubs and wives sinful**
 - b. **Can’t fake it in the home like we can in the community**

The second reason Paul repeats this command is because it’s easy for a wife to neglect in the home. Let’s be honest here. Submission in the community of faith is one thing...we all tend to put our best foot forward. *But living in a marriage is like looking into one of those make-up mirrors that women use that magnify and shine light on every imperfection in your face. Any character flaw your spouse possesses is magnified a thousand times when you live together in the home.* It’s easy to neglect this command because you see your husband, warts and all. Remember this ideal is corrupted when sin enters the picture. We don’t want to submit to anyone in ourselves. I asked my dear, sweet, kind wife what she thought about this text the other night. She said, “I don’t like it in my natural self. But it doesn’t matter. God calls me to it.” While all in the community are called to surrender their wills to one another in humility, there is a reminder that this is especially true in the home because of what God has done in establishing the lines of authority.

- B. The command is to be a voluntary decision of the will as an expression of obedience to XC.**
1. **Voluntary, not forced, in everything, bc of the position her husband has as head. (v. 24)**

In verse 24, the command for wives to submit is compared to the way the Church submits to its head, Jesus. **[READ]** This is not a forced subjugation. The form of the verb supplied in v. 22 and present in 24 tells us that this is a voluntary laying down of the will and is not dependent on what your husband is or does. Notice the tiny little phrase **“in everything.”** Wives are to generally to live in a spirit of submission regardless of whether their husband deserves their submission. Rather they do it because of the position their husband occupies as head - ordained by God.

Now, we have to remember the purpose of this text. This text doesn't interact with all the possible exceptions or what-ifs. He is here considering normal circumstances. He does the same thing in v. 29. Is a wife to follow her husband into sin or unbelief, or abuse? I don't think so. What Paul is doing is preventing a wife from compartmentalizing her submission. She can't say I'll submit to your headship here, here, and here; but not here or here. This is a general call for a wife to live in a spirit of submission in all things. Are there exceptions? Yes, but they are in the extremities.

2. The motivation isn't the husband, but Christ. He is man behind your man (v. 22, 24, 33)

Well as you probably know, your husband is not perfect. He will not respond appropriately to your submission all the time. But note the motivation here isn't anything to do with your husband. Whether in v. 21 for all of us, v. 22, 24, or 33, the motivation for the wife's submission isn't her husband - it's Christ. In some way submission to your husband is an expression of worship to Christ. Down in **verse 33** Paul gives the command again but with a different word. He tells the wife to "respect" her husband. Nearly every English version translates this as "respect," but that's a bit mild. The word is "fear." Now it doesn't mean "terror." Wives are not to live in terror. It means reverence. Wives are to honor and affirm the position of headship their husbands have in God's program. I take it to mean that the reverent respect of the wife points through their husband to Christ as an expression of worship.

So ladies, you're commanded to come under your husbands in the home in worship of the God-man who stands behind your man. This is what submission means here. That because of the way God has set things up, your husband occupies an out-front role in your home. And by reverencing that, you are expressing a love for and reliance upon Christ. So there is a God-man behind your man.

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Now, ladies, don't check out here. You got 3 verses, but we're about to hammer the husbands for the next 9. Christian marriage doesn't mean that the wife is a slave to her husband - doing his bidding. It means that both serve the other, surrendering their wills and rights to build the other up.

II. Men, God commands you to surrender as head and lead by loving, just like Christ. (v. 25-33)

A. Men are commanded to love sacrificially like Christ (v. 25)

Men, God commands you to surrender as head and lead by loving, just like Christ. So, while headship involves leadership, the command here is not to lead, but to love. [READ v. 25] This doesn't nullify leadership, it defines it. As John Piper said, "Jesus didn't stop being the Lion of Judah when He became the Lamb-like servant of the Church. Our command is to lead courageously like XC as we love sacrificially like Christ, who exercised His headship by coming under His bride.

1. We, as Christ our model, are to love sacrificially

In the sense that our headship is patterned after Christ's headship of the Church, we are to lead out of love. And, more to the point, leading flows from loving.

a. Description of that love - unconditional and voluntary, like Christ

Let's consider the kind of love we are to have. [READ v. 25] It's the highest love imaginable. It's divine love. We are called to love sacrificially, unconditionally, selflessly, regardless of merit, in spite of flaws, even when it hurts us to do so. Do I need to go on? Well I will. We are called to love even when our wives are undeserving, willing to sacrifice everything we are, in order to seek the highest good for our wives. If you are not loving like that, you are not leading the way Christ has called you to lead.

Just like with the wives, this command represents a decision of the will, not a response to anything your wife does. Your wife can be the naggiest, most critical woman on the planet, you're called to love her sacrificially. You know why? Because that's how Christ loved you, warts and all. Husbands are called to surrender themselves to their wives in the same way Christ did for the church. And did He ever. According to Philippians 2, He put the worship that was due Him as God aside to take on the form of a human and to become a servant. He lowered Himself. Paul says in v. 25 that He "gave Himself" - He willingly submitted His body to the cross for His bride. He, quite literally placed Himself under us in a grave in order that He might raise us up. Are we thoroughly convicted? I am.

2. This kind of headship seeks life/benefit for the other. (v. 26-27)

This kind of leadership seeks the best for the one it leads. Again, back to Christ in v. 26-27 [READ]. Why did Christ do it? He did it to set apart and perfect for Himself, a glorious holy bride. He is leading His bride towards life in Himself. Christ's loving leadership works to produce life in his bride, not death. In fact, it works to produce in His bride her deepest imaginable joy. Guys, your wife should be flourishing in life as a result of your loving care for her. Whether we like it or not, our wives are reflections of how we do in loving like Christ.

We fail in this by drifting to one of two extremes. We fail when we get lazy. This kind of Christlike sacrificial love is not passive. Christ sought you out. His love was active. He initiated and the Church responded. Guys we have to initiate and lead with this kind of love. It takes guts because we have to navigate mine-fields, but we've got to lead. But we also fail in a second way when we over-focus on leading to the neglect of loving. Guys, that gets dangerously close to abuse. I've met husbands who use submission and headship as a stick to beat their wives down and control them. That's a gross distortion of the marriage picture of two people surrendering themselves to one another in sacrificial love and submission. And quite frankly, it's sinful. So we exercise headship by coming under our spouses in order to see them flourish and become all God wants them to be.

Now will there be times in the course of day to day life when you don't see eye to eye on the best way to proceed in some decision? Sure. But let me make you a statement: If you're wife is flourishing as the recipient of Christlike love from your headship, she will follow. Because she knows that kind of love is concerned to bring her needs into the picture. *That kind of love doesn't say, "I'm the man, I call the shots." Again, I asked my dear, sweet, kind wife what she thought about this and she said, "Yes. when I feel loved like that, i'm willing to follow."* Surrendering in this way doesn't mean that we don't lead. It does mean that we recognize that we are responsible for us. We love sacrificially and watch her come along. Guys, that is called oneness. When that happens, you and your spouse act as one. You sense the direction you need to go and you move in rhythm with one another.

B. Commanded to love as own body to illustrate oneness to world (v. 28-32)

Paul shifts the metaphor in v. 28 to make a point about what this oneness illustrates to the world. [READ]

1. Deciding to love as own body (v. 28)
 - a. "ought" stresses volition

In **verse 28** he states the husband should love his wife as his own body. The word "ought" in NIV stresses that it is a decision of the will. We are called to love with the understanding that we are one flesh. And if we're one flesh, then the husband will love his wife as a loves his own body.

- b. we naturally care for and nourish our own bodies (v. 29)

In **verse 29**, Paul notes that this should be intuitive because we all care for our own bodies. [READ] *I'm looking around the room and noticing that most of us take care of ourselves. At the very least, it looks like we feed ourselves regularly.* All normal people (and again, that's who is in view) (and these are the words

here in v. 29) “nourish” and “cherish” or “care for” their bodies. If anything, most of us spend too much time nurturing and caring for ourselves. It’s normal. It’s a natural instinct to care for ourselves.

Again a comparison to Christ is made. He nourishes and cares for his church. Incidentally, do you see how Paul’s picture flies in the face of this idea that submission and headship mean that men get to sit around and drink beer all day and then demand sex from their wives at night? That’s an abomination! The love in view here seeks the best for his body. His desire is to build his wife up so that she flourishes and grows. This is how we treat ourselves. This is how Christ treats the church.

And that’s the point of the Genesis text in v. 31 [READ]. When you were married, you and your spouse were glued together. You became one flesh. That happened in order that you might illustrate to the world around you the oneness that is enjoyed by Christ and His Church.

2. Marriage as storyteller (v. 32)

Your marriage tells a story. Your marriage communicates to everyone around you - not least of which your kids - how Jesus treats His bride. What are you communicating about Christ’s love for His Church in the way you treat your marriage? That Christ is domineering, passive, neglectful, uncaring; or sacrificial, seeking the best for his bride by lovingly leading her to fullness of joy in Himself. What impression are your kids getting about Jesus in the way you treat your wife? Your marriage is a picture of the incredible distance christ traveled in sacrificing for his bride so they could be one together. Again, this is the mystery that Paul points to in verse 32 [READ]. In the OT, God was distant. You were part of the community of faith by virtue of your relationship mediated by one guy who once a year went into the presence of God on your behalf. But things changed in Christ. God came near. Now we can all experience oneness with him as His Body through faith. and that is the story that your marriage is supposed to communicate. Two becoming one as a result of sacrificial love and responsive surrender. As Geoff Bromiley said, “As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people.” AMEN!

And so Paul concludes in verse 33, as he did with the women, with a recap. Again, the individual is in view here. Husbands are called to love as they love themselves. They don’t exercise their headship in abuse or domination. Rather they do it gently as they care for and nourish their own bodies.

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well, anyone feeling inadequate? Christian marriage, marked by surrender, fueled by the Spirit. Two people surrendering for the benefit of the other and the honor of Christ. Wives respecting the Man behind their man who has given him the out-front position in the home. Men laying down their lives as they lead from love. It’s supernatural. We can’t do this on our own. But we can do it through the power of the Spirit. Marriage really does take 3.

III. Building super marriages

So as we conclude I want to offer up a few things that we can do to build these super marriages. Before I give you some homework, let me say one thing.

A. A caveat. Surrender is risky and, thus, demands trust.

Surrender is risky. It’s risky for us to surrender to another person because people are sinful. So if we’re going to do these things and surrender in submitting or loving, we have to stand on the bedrock of who we are in christ. You can’t do this unless you truly believe that you are absolutely, unconditionally secure in Christ’s love. That there is nothing that can happen to change what Christ did in making you secure and significant in His love. If you trust that, you will be freed up to kill your ego in your marriage and surrender in order to build up your spouse. Trust frees you from fear and enables you to surrender and minister.

B. Homework

1. Wives: “How can I help my husband today?”

So, with that in mind, let me give you some homework... Wives (again this comes compliments of my dear, sweet, kind wife): recognizing that there’s a God-man behind your man, take the risk and, for the next 7 days (go longer if you can, but you can do anything for 7 days), ask this question, “How can I help my husband today?” Some days you can pray it. You can ask it silently. Maybe you want to ask your husband directly. That might give him a heart attack and solve your problems. However you want to do it, do it everyday for the next 7 days. “How can I help my husband today?”

2. Husbands: “How can I love and serve my wife today?”

Guys, your turn. For the next 7 days you ask this question: “How can I love and serve my wife today?” Now don’t just ask it. Ask it and act upon it. Make it your aim.

3. Pray

Finally, and most important in developing a supernatural marriage is to call out to the supernatural. You’ve got to pray. You’ve got to pray for your spouse privately because God is the agent of change in his or her life, not you. You’ve got to pray for yourself, but, if possible, try to pray together. Pray that God will help you to kill those things that prevent you from cultivating a super marriage. Pray hard.

Conclusion - supernatural marriages take 3 because they are impossible with 2

As I said before, marriage really does take 3. If we’re going to build super marriages characterized by surrender, we must have the help of the Spirit. Natural marriages look like this [horizontal line]

Supernatural marriages, though, look like this [triangle]. And if you’ll notice, the closer the husband and wife get to Christ, the closer they get to each other all the way up the triangle. You can’t do this on your own. But God has rigged it. If you endeavor to get closer to Christ (as individuals and a couple), you will be drawn closer to each other.