

**Victory of the Lamb // May 16, 2021 // Pastor Ben Sadler
God's Call to Husbands and Wives // Series: Called**

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:21-33)

About 100 years ago, marriage was everything, especially in traditional cultures. My wife and I are watching the TV show *Downton Abbey*. Don't judge. It takes place a hundred ago in an aristocratic manor in England during WWI. In that culture at that time marriage was everything. Who you married determined your place in society. Who you married determined what kind of life you would inherit. Who you married and how many kids you had determined you level of happiness. And that is why all the drama and scandal in the show is surrounding marriage. That's how it was 100 years ago. Marriage was everything.

That idolization of marriage still lingers today. There is this idea that marriage is the pinnacle goal for life. If a person doesn't get married they won't be complete or find happiness. If a Christian is tempted to believe that marriage is the only calling in life or the highest calling, then that person needs to remember that the founder of our faith, Jesus, was never married. Nor was the leading Apostle and writer of the New Testament Paul. In other words, marriage isn't everything.

In our modern world, there is another extreme. We might dismiss marriage and even despise it. To us, marriage is nothing at all. I remember talking to a friend of mine about 20 years ago. He was living with his girlfriend at the time, and he told me, “I never plan on marrying her. I don't want to get married at all. Every marriage I know has failed. And all the people who have gotten married are miserable.” I think this perspective is a much more common in our current culture. Our modern culture sees marriage as inhibiting my personal happiness. It is burden, and a heavy commitment. It is not a sacred institution that has been created and established by God, but a human idea that needs to be reformed or removed all together.

In the past, marriage was everything. Today, for some, marriage has very little value. But the Bible says that marriage should be honored by all as a gift of God. But why? Why is marriage so important to God and his people? **Why does God want husbands and wives to live out their callings in marriage?**

To answer this question, we are going to look at what Paul, a single man, wrote to his church in Ephesus. The way that Paul sets up this section feels like a drama on a stage. He calls different actors out on stage and he gives them their script and their part that they are supposed to play.

Paul begins by calling the wife to center stage. The spotlight is put on her. And Paul gives her a script and tells her what role she is going to play. He says, **²²Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

What role do wives play in God's divine drama? Wives play the role of the Church. And as the Church they are to look at their husband like the Church looks to Christ. Paul uses the word submit here. And that word has a lot of baggage. When we hear the word submit it makes us think of abusive relationships and domineering husbands. But later, as Paul explains this role, he also uses the word respect. That probably makes more sense to us today.

When the wife plays the part of the Church and she says to her husband, "I respect you. I trust where you are leading our family. Where you go I will go" we, as the church, see our relationship with Jesus. We respect and trust in Jesus' leadership. We want to follow Jesus and let him lead in our lives. When wives carry out this role, they show us how to be the church of Jesus.

Paul lets the wives exit the stage and he calls the husbands to center stage. And he puts the spotlight on the husbands and gives them their script and their part to play in this divine drama. **²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

Husbands, you are to play the part of Jesus in the divine drama. What did Christ do for his Church? He died and gave himself up for her. He put her needs and salvation before his own. He washed her through baptism and made her to be a radiant church without any blemish, but holy and blameless.

That's what you are to do, husbands. Love your wives. And love is an action. It is a sacrifice. It is doing what needs to be done for the good of your wife over your own selfishness. And when you make sacrifices for your wife, the Church sees the great sacrifice that Jesus made for us. When you look at your wives as holy and blameless, we see how Jesus looks at us. He doesn't hold our sins against us but loves us and calls us holy.

But Paul is not done yet. There is still more of your part that you need to play. He says, **²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."**

Paul says that husbands play the role of Jesus. And Jesus is one with his church. The church is the body of Christ. And because we are the body of Christ, Jesus feeds and cares for us. Husbands, when you got married to your wife, you became one flesh, one body. Your job is to take care of your wife like your own body. Honor her. Protect her. Care for her. Certainly don't do anything that would harm her. And when you treat your wife as your own body, we see how Jesus treats us. We see the love of Christ dramatized and acted out in your marriage.

Paul summarizes his main point by saying, ³²**This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.** In other words, the great mystery, the great drama is the marriage between Christ and his Church, the reunification of heaven and earth. This is the epic story that every marriage is supposed to point to. This is a profound mystery. It is beyond understanding how God is going to bring everything back together in Christ. That's the story that marriage is supposed to be telling.

So here is the answer to our opening question:

Why does God want husbands and wives to live out their callings in marriage?

Marriage tells the story of God's relationship with his people.

When we turn to the last page of the Bible we get a glimpse of where this relationship is headed. John, the Apostle, gets a vision of what is going to happen on the Last Day and this is how he describes it:

21 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The Last Day is pictured as a wedding feast. God will recreate heaven and earth and the bride, the Church will be beautifully dressed for her husband. And God and his people will dwell again together in unity because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He will make all things new. And there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

This is the story that healthy, Christian marriages are supposed to be telling. Marriage is not an end in itself. Marriage is not everything. Marriage is not heaven on earth. Marriage is supposed to point all of us, single and married people to the great wedding at the end of time. To the reunification of God and his people.

And that's why Paul closes this section with these words, **"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."**

In other words, husbands, you have a high calling of representing Christ to the world. Love your wife. Make sacrifices for her, so that you can have a unified marriage of love and point us to the goal of history. This is a daily task. This is what you are called to do. I don't know what this is like for you. I would encourage you to read the *5 Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. This book is one of the top selling books every year for decades. Figure out how your wife feels loved. Then go make those sacrifices for her to show her how Jesus loves us. Does she feel most loved with gifts? Buy her a gift. Does she feel

most loved with quality time? Spend some time with her. Does she feel most loved with acts of service? Clean the house. Does she feel most loved words of affirmation? Write her a love note. Is it physical touch? Give her a hug with no agenda. Why? Because when you do, you are telling the cosmic drama of Christ and his church. This is your daily calling: **Husbands, love your wives.**

Wives, carry out your calling by respecting your husbands. More than anything, they want to know they are doing the right things and leading the family in the right direction. They want to be trusted. I'm talking about a husband who is not abusive or manipulative but is trying his best. This husband wants to hear, "I trust you" even more than hearing "I love you." And when you respect your husband, you tell the story of how the Church trusts and follows Christ. **Wives, respect your husbands.**

Marriage is not everything. It is not the goal of our existence. But marriage is also not to be despised. Marriage a good gift of God. And if we are married, our primary calling is to love and care for our spouse. We give our best to our marriages because it points us all to something much greater: The wedding supper of the Lamb, the marriage between Christ and his Church. That is the goal of history. That is where this story is all pointing. So husbands and wives, play your part in God's divine drama because when you do, you remind us that our story is headed for a true happy ending.

