

"UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT"
PART 13: EPHESIANS 5:22-33

We have been going through Ephesians and we have made it up to Chapter 5. And as we get into our passage this morning, I think it is important that we understand what being submissive is. The question was raised at the end of our class last time (a really good one), what does Paul mean when he says, "submitting one to another" (Ephesians 5:21)? And so, I answered it the best that I could just off the cuff. I thought [my answer was OK], but then as I began to prepare the lesson this week, I found a better answer. And it comes right out of the Bible, out of Philippians Chapter 2. In context in Philippians, Paul is talking about how our Christian behavior is directly dependent on our unity in Christ. It is the same thing he has been talking about in Ephesians. But then, Paul makes this statement which I really think defines what submitting to one another is. He says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his [or her] own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). This is what Christian submission is. It is an act of humility. A submissive person does NOT lord it over or force their agenda and plans on others. They are unselfish. That passage in Philippians then goes on to describe how Christ is our example, how He submitted Himself to the Father's will. He says, "And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). So, Jesus is our example. Being submissive is NOT a sign of weakness. Rather, [being submissive] demonstrates godly, Christ-like humility.

I wanted to say that right [at the beginning] because we are going to get into what [Ephesians] says and right off the bat, he says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands. So, I needed to clarify what being submissive is. I always want to remind everybody before we get into this section in Ephesians [that] v 21 says, "submitting to one another in Christ,"

right? So, we are not going to pick on the women or the men. It is for all of us.

Now, in this morning's lesson Paul is going to show us what I just described – the whole thing about submitting one to another – what that looks like in a marriage relationship. Keep in mind that Paul has been talking about, in context here in this part of Ephesians, the Spirit-filled life, [the] Christian whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit. The effect of this is that the fruit of the Spirit will be on full display in a person's life – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

OK, so full disclosure before we get started on this lesson; before I delve in and start talking about the passage itself. I need to say something because this whole section in Ephesians that we are about to get into is completely at odds with the ideas embraced by our current culture. You need to know that. What has happened is that fallen humanity has replaced God's original plan for marriage with their own ideas about marriage. You see that in our world today. You see even Christians who live together, possibly even having sex before marriage. They will say that it is normal, but it is not what the Bible teaches. So, there is this ever-increasing pushback against the teachings of the Bible. Hostility toward Christianity is on the rise just in case you have not noticed. What I am about to say is not going to be considered "politically correct." But I am not trying to be. It is, nonetheless truth, God's truth, and we need to hear it, unpopular as it might be. I feel like I would not be doing my job as a Bible teacher if I did not tell you what the Bible has to say.

So, here we go. We are going to get into the passage. We are going to wives first.

READ Ephesians 5:22-24

I told you it was not going to be what the world wants to hear. This is not some far out, isolated text either. Very similar things are said other places. Colossians 3:18 says, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting

in the Lord." First Peter 3:1 says, "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands..." So, wives, just for your information, if you desire to honor Jesus Christ (which I assume all of you all do), then you submit to your husband. That is what the Bible says.

V 23 tells you why you submit – because "the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church." So, a marriage relationship beautifully pictures the relationship between Christ and His church. Have you ever thought about that?

V 24 says, "as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." While marriage is indeed a partnership, the roles of the husband and the wife are different (there may be some that are the same, but generally, they are different). The assigned roles of husbands and wives go all the way back to Genesis Chapter 3. Right after [Adam and Eve] sinned, there was this curse by God. Remember He curses the serpent first. Then He gives a curse to the woman, to Eve, and then to Adam. And this is the curse that He gave to women: God said, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16 NLT). That is the curse, ladies. That is the curse that God gave to the woman because of original sin.

In all the relationships that are mentioned in Ephesians, God has designed a head. Christ is the head of the church. Paul has talked about that relationship. Husbands are the head of the wife. Parents are the head of the children. Employers are the head of the employees. There is an intentionally designed hierarchy. It is not that God is being mean or unfair. No. God has a reason for it and that is that He wants to prevent complete disorder and chaos. There has to be some kind of order. So, every relationship needs someone to be the head. Now, we all understand in physical terms what the head does for the rest of the body. It controls the body's various functions, right? Cut off the head and the body cannot function. The head has authority over the rest of the body. It is not that the head is more important than the rest of the body. The fact is the body

needs the head and the head needs the body. Their functions are different. They have different roles. But together, they function well.

Now, let me make something clear about this and then we will get to the men. Authority does NOT mean authoritarian. Remember, guys, our model is Jesus Christ, right? In God's design the wife follows the model of the church as she submits to her husband. And then God delegated the husband to be head over his wife. Why? Because of the husband's unique role in the relationship. He is stronger physically. He is not better. He is just stronger physically. So, his unique role (which goes back to Genesis) is to be the provider, the protector, the security, the preserver, the rescuer; to take care of his wife. That is his role. I look at it this way – we husbands are to be our wives' heroes! And so, the godly wife submits to her husband. She humbly and willingly places herself under the divinely ordained headship of her husband. That is God's design. It comes right from the pages of Ephesians.

Like I said, this is not popular in today's culture. But my job is not to stand up here and to moderate a debate about this. It is simply to tell you what God's word says. If the husband is modelling Christ like he should (and we are going to get to them next), then this will not be a problem or an issue with his wife at all.

By the way, something interesting [about this passage in Ephesians] -- there are 3 verses to the ladies and 9 verses to the men.

[One class member pointed out what Paul said: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV). If the husbands expect their wives to follow them, then they need to follow Christ first.

Another shared that in any relationship there needs to be someone who makes the final decision if both are deadlocked, thus the need for a head. While that is true, I pointed out that the husband-wife relationship is a partnership. Both need to listen to each other and consider the other person's opinion. I have found in my own experience over time that my wife is frequently right and makes good points.]

READ Ephesians 5:25-27

Let's talk about what this means. "Love your wives." We understand that part. Nothing about authority here, by the way. "Love your wives." That is his emphasis. Nothing about dominance (tell her what to do, boss her around). Nothing about ruling. Nothing about commanding. "Love your wives -- as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her..." Now that is a pretty high standard. How many of you all are loving like that?

The Greek word for love here is *agapeo*. It is an unconditional and intentional love; selfless, self-sacrificing love. It is the kind of love Christ has for His church. He loved us – get this – even while we were in our lost and rebellious condition. When we did not love Him, He loved us. We are following Him now. We are doing the best we can, but when He first loved us, we were dirty, rotten sinners, rebellious, right? He still loved us.

Now, v 26 and 27 are a little bit harder to understand. It mentions how the husband, like Christ, "sanctifies" his wife. He cleanses her. He presents her as holy and without blemish. In other words, the husband seeks his own wife's spiritual and physical purity. He is not going to lead her to do something that is sinful. That is important. He is the spiritual leader in that sense. He is not going to bait her or try to get her to react. That is not Christ-like. The husband's role is to be the spiritual leader of the relationship and to take the lead in the spiritual development and well-being of his entire family. [This includes] things like going to church. The husband should be the leader of that effort. Also, leading in family worship and so forth. [In my own family growing up] that was important. Every time the church was open, we were there, Sunday morning, Sunday nights (do you remember when we had Sunday evening services?). And then, Wednesday night services. We were at everything. We even went to visitation on Tuesday nights sometimes.

Think about it this way... the husband does what he can to bring joy and fulfillment into his wife's life. This is God's design. But, unfortunately,

in a lot of Christian marriages, this is not what happens, is it? So let me tell you a little story...

When I was in basic training in the Air Force, I received a rare letter from my dad. My dad did not usually write letters. And my relationship with him through the years was not particularly close. We loved each other, but we did not sit down and talk. In that letter he shared his heart with me. I had never seen that side of him before. Frankly, it changed our relationship. I wept when I read that letter. I began to understand him better. One of the things that he expressed in that letter to me was his regret at not having been the spiritual leader of our household all those years that I was growing up. He acknowledged that the spiritual leadership had fallen to my mother and he praised her for having done that. I do thank God for godly mothers who often times lead the family spiritually. But that was a regret that he expressed to me. Now, I had never even thought much about it. I did not have any resentments toward him. I knew my dad's story. He was raised in a broken home. His father died when he was a teenager. His mother was not really a mother who was present at all in the relationship, not a good mom. She basically abandoned the kids to someone else to raise them. She ran off and did her own thing. He was homeless and another couple took him in. So, he was raised in this broken home environment and was not even saved until he was an adult. So, I cut my dad some slack because of his background. Now that he was a little more spiritually mature, he was beginning to see that, "Hey, I dropped the ball." He was having these regrets and so, he expressed those to me. I respected him for being honest like that. He confessed that he had ceded the responsibility [as spiritual leader] to my mother.

READ Ephesians 5:28

Here is just a thought, guys – how much time do we [spend daily] taking caring for ourselves [our own bodies]? Eating, grooming, showering, all the things we do. We try to take time doing those things. We should nourish and cherish our wives to the same degree, right? Whenever I leave the house, I make sure I have my keys, my wallet and my cell phone. I

make sure I have everything. I make sure I fasten my seat belt. I need to have the same sense of well-being and security for my wife as I do for myself. Maybe even more so.

READ Ephesians 5:29-30

This gets back to what Paul had said earlier to the wives about comparing the husband-wife relationship to the relationship between Christ and the church. He is just driving this point home.

What is Paul's conclusion then in v 31? "Therefore," and he quotes from Genesis Chapter 2, God's original plan (a verse you hear at all the weddings).

READ Ephesians 5:31-33

In a Christian marriage relationship, BOTH wives and husbands submit to each other. Now, maybe you have not thought about that. V 21 says that. We submit one to another. Wives obviously submit to their husbands when they place themselves under his leadership and honor him as the head of the house. And husbands, likewise, are submitting to their wives when they love them and understand them and are sensitive to their needs. That is not an easy thing sometimes for guys to do because we are not so sensitive. I love the way that Peter says it in First Peter. He says, "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel [he is talking about weaker physically], since they are heirs with you of the grace of life [this is Peter's word for marriage], so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). It actually affects your prayer life if you are not treating your wife the way you should. That is what Peter says.

So, marriage is a give and take relationship. Though it can be fulfilling, enjoyable and rewarding, it takes work. It may require at times for us (guys) to put our own plans and agendas aside for the other person's sake. That is what genuine Christian love does. And this is not something that we do grudgingly, but happily, as unto to the Lord.

Let me close with this thought... Earlier I talked about my dad and the letter he wrote me and his regrets that he had. The one thing that I can give my dad full credit for -- the legacy of love that he left every one of his kids (me and my two sisters). If they were sitting here today, they would vouch for that. With all of his faults, there was never a shadow of doubt as to how much he loved us and especially how much he loved [our] mother. And he showed it every day.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Respect and honor him. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. Cherish her. Nurture her. Jesus said to His disciples, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have LOVE for one another" (John 13:35). It starts in a marriage relationship and goes from there.

My prayer is that all of our marriages (as Christian couples) will be a living, breathing testimony to the world of God's redeeming and restoring, and unending love.

[At the end of class one person raised the question about a situation where a Christian is married to an unbeliever. The focus of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5:22-33 is to believers, to Christian couples. Paul DOES talk in other places about the responsibility of Christians should they find themselves in partnership with an unbelieving spouse (for example, 1 Corinthians 7:12-24). While the situation is different, the Christian partner is still to show Christ-like love and is called to submit to the unbelieving partner "as unto the Lord."

As Christians, we are responsible for our own behavior. Our goal should be to glorify the Lord in our marriage relationship and to continue to pray for our spouse.]