

ARE YOU HONORING GOD IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

5²²Wives, [submit] to your own husbands as to the Lord, ²³because the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, he being the savior of the body. ²⁴But as the church is in submission to Christ, so also wives [ought to submit] to their husbands in all things. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word—²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in glory, without blemish or wrinkle or any [other] such thing, but being holy and blameless. ²⁸Likewise, husbands ought to love their own wives as [they love] their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹No one ever hated his own flesh; rather, he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ [cares for] the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³²This is a profound mystery, now I am speaking about Christ and the church. ³³Nevertheless, let each one of you love his own wife just as [he loves] himself; and let the wife respect her husband. (Eph. 5:22-33)

Introduction

Nina was really discouraged. When she first married Jeff, she was so eager to please him; that was nine years ago. Now she felt she could no longer bear his perfectionism, his insults, and his tendency to blame her for everything that went wrong. She had tried to tell him about the way she felt, but he refused to listen. No matter what she did to try to please him, his cutting remarks and accusations continued. She was convinced that God was never going to change her husband, and she might as well give up.

A few nights after coming to this conclusion, she gave the whole matter over to the Lord. She told the Lord she was going to stop trying to change her husband. She told the Lord she was turning everything over to Him. She told the Lord she was going to trust and obey Him in everything. An amazing thing happened. Jeff did change; but not until long after Nina changed. (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/10/93)

The first change that occurred was a change in Nina's perspective. She stopped trying to make a happy marriage for herself by changing Jeff. Instead, she concentrated on honoring God in her marriage by doing His will. One of the results was a new and happy marriage.

As we come to Ephesians 5:22-33, there are two important things to recognize. First, this passage is **not** about making a happy marriage for yourself—it is about honoring God in your marriage. Second, when both marriage partners seek to honor God in their marriage by fulfilling their God-given roles, they will be blessed with a happy marriage. The important question is this: Are you honoring God in your marriage?

I. Wives, Honor God in Your Marriage, ...by Submitting to Your Husband (5:22-24,33b)

In verse 22 the Apostle Paul exhorts Christian wives to be in submission to their own husbands. Note the connection between verses 18, 21 and 22: *"be filled with the Spirit"* (5:18,) *"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (5:21,) *"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord"* (5:22.) Verse 18 exhorts the Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Verse 21 indicates that one evidence and one mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit is living in submission to one another. Now in verse 22 Paul indicates that when Christian wives are living a Spirit-filled life, this characteristic of godly submission will be especially displayed in the marriage relationship and will be practiced with regard to the wife's relationship to her husband.

One evidence of a Spirit-filled life is submissiveness; and, conversely, the source of submissiveness is a Spirit-filled life. The key to fulfilling the biblical command addressed to wives is to do what Nina did: she turned everything over to the Lord and told Him she was going to trust and obey Him in everything—and the Lord gave her the grace she needed.

The apostle goes on to write, *"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord"* That is to say, the Christian wife is to submit herself to her husband for the sake of Jesus, doing it out of love and devotion to her Lord. She should do so remembering that out of love for her the Lord Jesus submitted Himself to God, which meant going to the cross of Calvary. The Christian wife must bear in mind the words of her Lord Jesus: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (Jn. 14:15,) and, *"Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, but do not do the things I say?"* (Lk. 6:46.)

The wife is to submit herself to her husband because he is responsible to fulfill the role of the Lord Jesus in the marriage: *"the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church ... ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"* (Eph. 5:23,25.) Wives are to be in submission to their own husbands *"because the husband is the head of the wife."* There is a divine order of authority and dominion that God has established over and in His creation. At the very outset, God made it clear to Adam that he was obligated to live in submission to his Creator: *"And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Gen. 2:16-17.) The divine structure of authority and submission operates within the church as an expression of life within the kingdom of God and as a witness to the world: *"Christ is the head of the church"* (vs. 23,) and *"the church is in submission to Christ"* (vs. 24.) This divinely ordained structure of authority and submission is to be modeled in our marriages to the honor and glory of God and as a divine witness to the world. Within the marriage, God has assigned to the husband the role of portraying Christ in His self-giving

love for the church, and to the wife He has assigned the role of portraying the church in her submission to her Lord.

Wives are to be in submission to their own husbands *"in all things"* (vs. 24.) That is to say, the wife is to be in submission to her husband in every aspect of the marriage. Conversely, no aspect of the marriage is exempt from the husband's God-given responsibility—in no area of the marriage may the husband abrogate his responsibility of supplying loving leadership and security for his wife.

Wives, honor God in your marriage, by submitting to your husbands for Jesus' sake.

II. Husbands, Honor God in Your Marriage, ...by Loving Your Wife (5:25-33a)

The Apostle Paul exhorts Christian husbands, *"love your wives."* The specific way in which the husband displays the submissiveness that is characteristic of a Spirit-filled life is by obeying the commandment of Ephesians 5:25, *"Husbands, love your wives."* Twice in the passage of Ephesians five the wife is commanded to be in submission to her husband (vs. 22, 24.) But three times the husband is commanded to love his wife (vs. 25, 28, 33.)

Note: The husband is **not** instructed to make sure that his wife lives in submission to him; on the contrary, he is commanded to love his wife. The husband is to concentrate upon his God-given responsibility to his wife, and leave the fulfillment of his wife's responsibility to her and to God. There are at least five ways in which a husband can express his love: 1) by performing acts of service for his wife; 2) by expressions of appreciation and gratitude; 3) by presenting her with gifts; 4) by listening to her; and 5) by touching her in a gentle and compassionate manner.

Husbands are commanded to love their wives *"just as Christ loved the church."* Out of love, Christ gave himself up for the church. Christ denied Himself; He sacrificed Himself, all for the life and well being of His church. The Christian husband is to sacrifice himself (his time, his use of money, his desires, etc.) for the sake of his wife. When his wife pleads with him to listen to her and to spend time with her, out of love for her and for Christ, the Christian husband must respond to her request. When your wife desires that you take her out for a romantic dinner, but you want to watch a sporting event on T.V., as a Christian husband, what should you choose to do? When your wife tells you of a new dress she would love to have, and you have your heart set on a new piece of sporting equipment (golf clubs, bowling ball, etc.), as a Christian husband, how should you spend that bonus money you have received from your employer?

Christian husbands are to love their wives *"as they love their own bodies"* (vs. 28.) The husband must look at the way in which he loves his body: he nourishes it (by

feeding it three times a day,) and he cherishes it (by protecting it and caring for it when it is injured or ill.) Then he must proceed to love his wife in the same way: by nourishing her: seeking to meet her needs (physically, emotionally, sexually); listening to her and seeking to fulfill her desires; by cherishing her: the husband must protect his wife, care for his wife, promote her well-being, appreciate his wife, and thank the Lord for his wife.

Note how Christ lovingly and painstakingly is preparing us as His church for a glorious future with Himself, as described in verses 25-27, He concerns Himself with our well being,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word—²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in glory, without blemish or wrinkle or any [other] such thing, but being holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25-27)

Christian husbands are to help their wives grow into all they can become as godly women, and by no means is the Christian husband to stifle his wife's spiritual life or the use of her God-given gifts.

Husbands are to love their wives by putting into practice the instruction contained in Genesis 2:24—the passage of Scripture the apostle quotes in verse 31. The husband must leave his father and mother. The childhood ties with his parents—both physically and emotionally—must be severed. Upon entering into marriage, the man must no longer view himself as being under the dominion and authority of his parents, (though he does continue to have the obligation to honor them and care for them in their time of need.) The husband must cleave to his wife; he must take the leadership in establishing a new and independent family unit. He must recognize that now a new loyalty and priority must take precedence; his loyalty to his wife now must take priority over that which he formerly rendered to his parents in the time of his youth. He must recognize that a new responsibility takes precedence; the responsibility of headship in his marriage now takes priority over the former responsibility of submission to his parents, which prevailed during the time of his youth.

The Christian husband is exhorted to love his wife *“just as he loves himself”* (vs. 33.) Note the connection between the command of Ephesians 5:33 and the commandment of Matthew 22:39, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* The way we are instructed to fulfill our obligation to our neighbor helps us to understand how, as Christian husbands, we are also to fulfill our obligation to our wives. According to Romans 13:10, *“Love does no harm to its neighbor.”* In Matthew 7:12 our Lord Jesus declares, *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

Husbands, honor God in your marriage, by loving your wives for Jesus' sake.

Conclusion

Are you honoring God in your marriage? Wives, are you doing so by submitting to your husbands? Husbands, are you doing so by loving your wives?