

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

LECTURE NO 03

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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Even as the Church is subject unto Christ, and Christ loveth the Church and gave Himself for her, even so Paul describeth the marriage covenant.

Ephesians 5:21–33 is the most detailed passage in the New Testament concerning the relationship between husband and wife, and the manner in which they are to walk in that covenant **Ephesians 5:21–33**

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.
Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body.
Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loved his wife loved himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourished and cherished it, even as the Lord the Church:
for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.
For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.
Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she reverence her husband. Amen.”

Exposition of the Text

Mutual Submission in the Fear of Christ (v. 21)

Verse 21 declared the relationship of believers within the Church: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.” This **mutual submission** is rooted not in inferiority, but in reverence unto the Lord. When we humble ourselves before one another, it bringeth no diminishing of honour or dignity; rather, it is an act of giving honour while standing in the fear of God.

Submission of Wives and the Headship of Husbands (vv. 22–24)

In verse 22 the wives are commanded to be subject unto their own husbands “as unto the Lord.” The phrase “submit yourselves” is not repeated in the Greek text of verse 22, for it is carried forward from verse 21. The thought therefore continued directly from the call to mutual submission among all believers.

Here we see:

The wife’s submission is **not** grounded in any notion of her inferiority, nor because the husband is of greater worth or more esteemed before God. She is not commanded to submit because she is lesser in dignity or honour. Rather, she submitted **unto the Lord**, in reverence to Christ, acknowledging the divine order that God hath established.

Christ the Model for Husbands and Wives

The foundation of Paul’s teaching is this: **Christ Himself is our model**. His example guided all believers. We walk in His steps. His love, His sacrifice, His purity, and His leadership form the pattern for Christian marriage.

THE DUTY OF THE WIFE’S SUBMISSION

The wife is to remain subject unto her husband, for this is her duty and charge from the Lord, even as believers, being subject unto God, fulfil their duty and responsibility. As it is written in verse 21, “*Submitting yourselves one to another.*” The meaning of mutual subjection is not that one is more excellent, superior, higher, or more important than the other; for all are important; yea, all are equal in God. Even so, within the holy estate of marriage, the husband and the wife are equal; yet the wife is commanded to be subject unto her husband. For according to the Epistle to the Ephesians, the order of creation, the divine arrangement and the system that God hath ordained, assigned unto the wife this responsibility. God is the Head, then Christ, then the husband, and then the wife.

Now this doctrine was altogether different from Roman culture, for the Romans considered women to be inferior, despised, and lower, saying that by nature, and by bodily strength, woman was weaker than man, and therefore she must be subject to her husband. But the Scripture declared that spiritually and naturally—both in soul and in nature—the woman is equal unto the man. For as much as man was made in the image of God, even so was the woman. As much atonement as Christ gave for man, so much gave Him for the woman. As much as the Holy Ghost is given unto man, so much is He given unto the woman.

THE HUSBAND AS HEAD

The following verse saith, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body.*” In English the word **head** is used; in the Greek the word is **kephalē**. If ye look at 1 Corinthians 11:3—yea, let us look at it—there it is written: “*But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.*”

Thus a hierarchy is presented—a structure of authority and divine administration:

God → Christ → Man → Woman.

And in the Epistle to the Ephesians, this same structure is used, including also the Church:

Christ is the Head of the Church. In Corinthians it is written that Christ is the Head of the man, yet in Ephesians Christ is said to be the Head of the Church.

Therefore the man is the head of the woman, and Christ is the Head of the Church. And even as the Church is subject unto Christ, and Christ leadeth the Church, even so the wife is to be subject unto her head—the husband—and the husband is to fulfil the role of leader toward his wife. But behold, what did Jesus, as the Head of the Church, do? It is written, “*He is the Saviour of the body.*” Christ is the Defender of the Church; Christ is the Protector of the Church; Christ is the Provider of the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ saveth His Church, defended it, guarded it, and provided for it.

Even so, the husband, as head and overseer of his wife and household, must protect his wife, and if there be children, them also; and he must provide for them.

THE FAILINGS FOUND IN MANY HOMES

Amongst our Christian families two great problems are often heard. The first: a man is married, and children are born, yet he worked not, though he desired to hold the office of headship. He refused the duty of provider, yet expected his wife to remain subject unto him. This is injustice. Therefore, O young men—ye who watch and hear—be diligent, be labourers, be workers. An unmanly man is not only one who is physically impotent; an unmanly man is also he who refused, through labour and sacrifice, to fulfil the duties of marriage and family.

Thus the first problem in many Pakistani Christian homes is this: men desire to be heads, yet they refuse to provide, to labour, and to work. This is a serious trouble.

The second problem: men love the idea of being *head*, yet refuse the duty of defending and protecting. Instead, they commit physical violence against their wives. But of Christ it is written that He is the Saviour of the body—its defender and protector. Yet many husbands are smites of the body, beaters, afflicters, and oppressors of their wives. Therefore I challenge Pakistani Christian husbands: if ye would be the head of your wife, then ye must follow Christ your model—be her protector and her defender. Often a husband, hearing some report from a relative or friend concerning his wife, immediately scolded or beateth her. Why dost thou not first hear thy wife?

Christ is the Saviour of the body; even so must the husband defend his wife.

THE LIMITS OF HUSBANDLY AUTHORITY

Remember also this: Christ is the Head of the Church, and the husband is the head of the wife; yet Scripture never teaches that the husband may hold in his wife's life the same position that Christ holdeth. For the husband is **not** God; Jesus Christ is perfect Man and perfect God. A husband may lead his wife into evil; such men exist. But Christ never leadeth His Church into sin.

Therefore, if a husband demanded of his wife a submission equal unto the submission due unto Christ—that whatsoever he saith, she must obey in all things—such a husband sinned. If a husband incited his wife unto sin, or commanded her to do evil, she hath the right to refuse.

For Christ is the Head of both, and if the husband drawled her toward wickedness, she may lawfully say, “No.”

Even if the husband refused to fulfil his own responsibilities and yet expected his wife to fulfil hers, the wife should indeed fulfil her duties; but where there is abuse, violence, and oppression—if he strikes her—she hath the right to defend herself and restrain him from harming her.

THE MEANING OF “IN EVERYTHING”

Verse 24 saith, *“Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”* Here note well the **spirit of the text**. The commentators have discussed this deeply. The sense is this: Christ never commanded the Church to sin; therefore the phrase “in everything” signifies “in every good, right, and proper thing.”

Let me give a delicate but necessary example, for such matters arise in real lives. A certain young man in Lahore, before marriage, was addicted to watching filthy movies on the internet. After marriage, he compelled his wife to imitate the immoral acts shown therein. The marriage lasted but three months. This man was sexually abusing his wife. In such a case, in the light of Scripture, the wife hath the right to refuse.

Similarly, if a husband saith unto his wife, “Lie for me,” or “Steal for me,” or “Do this evil for my sake,” she is **not** to be subject unto him in such matters. Therefore “in everything” meant: in every righteous, honourable, and lawful matter.

Even when it is difficult, the wife, abiding in the Lord, should fulfil her duty; but the husband must not exploit her virtue, nor take wrongful advantage of her obedience. Rather he, as leader, must focus not on fulfilling his *desires*, but his *duties* and responsibilities.

THE HUSBAND’S SUPREME DUTY: LOVE

What is his duty? Let us look at verse 25: *“Husbands, love your wives ‘Even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.’”*

If the wife’s submission bringeth respect and honour unto her husband, then the husband’s love must, with equal strength, be sacrificial, active, responsible, and self-denying—even as Christ loved the Church and delivered Himself unto death.

Thus the husband must, through sacrifice, compromise, and the laying aside of his pride and self-will, show love unto his wife for her good, her well-being, and her joy.

Christ’s love for the Church is perfect love. If Christ is the husband’s model, then the husband must show unto his wife a love that seeketh her good, a love that exalted her dignity, and a love that is willing to sacrifice.

THE HONOUR OF MARRIAGE AND THE MUTUAL EDIFICATION OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

The Husband’s Love Strengthened the Wife

The love of a husband strengthened the sense of worth and dignity in his wife. The love wherewith the husband loved his wife testifies unto her heart, saying, *Thou art precious, thou art of value; I seek thy good, thy advancement, and thy honour; I desire to be an instrument for the increase of thy dignity and excellence.*

And if a husband manifest such love, then verily the wife, in most cases, shall render honour unto him—except where a woman hath been compelled into marriage against her will, and had no desire to enter therein.

Mutual Submission and Cooperation

Even so, if the wife continued steadfastly to walk in cooperation with her husband, and the husband continue steadfastly to love his wife, then this **mutual submission one to another**, wherein each seeketh the good of the other, bringeth forth a prosperous and successful marriage.

Christ Sanctifies His Church

“That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

Here the Scripture speaketh of Christ, who sanctifies His Church. He caused His Church to grow in holiness, righteousness, and sincerity.

Even so may the principle be applied unto the husband and wife: the husband ought to be an instrument of his wife’s **bodily, spiritual, and moral growth?**

Of a truth, salvation and sanctification belonged unto Christ alone; the husband cannot bestow these. Yet the husband’s companionship may indeed become a means of his wife’s

The Husband Who Afflicted His Wife Harmed Himself Also

Remember: a husband who bringeth affliction to his wife, instead of being a cause of her progress, bringeth harm upon himself and upon his children.

A Glorious Church without Spot or Wrinkle

“That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Again, the principle is mutual edification: husband and wife must become the cause of each other’s purity, growth, and excellence.

Husbands to Love Their Wives as Their Own Bodies

Thus Paul saith in verse 28, *“So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself.”*

This is a great command, and not easily fulfilled—to love one’s wife **as oneself**.

This statement was revolutionary in the context of the Roman world wherein husbands often treated their wives as servants or slaves. But the Gospel transformed society: the husband is commanded **not** to treat his wife as a servant, but **as his own body**.

If the husband is appointed head of the household, then his responsibility is exceedingly great. Many take marriage for granted as merely a cultural obligation, but Scripture assigned it a noble and holy place.

The Wife Is an Extension of the Husband's Person

Even as the Church is the body of Christ, so the wife is the extension of the husband's person. Therefore, when a husband treated his wife well, he treated himself well; when he treated her poorly, he dealt harshly with himself.

The same law applied to the wife: when she respected and obeyed her husband, she benefited herself and her children. Wherever love and honour dwell in a home, the children also grow in that same temperament. Where strife abounded, their personalities suffer harm.

Christ Nourished the Church; So Must Husband and Wife Nourish Each Other

"For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church."

Christ nourishes and buildeth His Church; even so must the husband become the cause of his wife's growth, and the wife likewise the cause of her husband's wellbeing.

A marriage cannot flourish if husband and wife are divided, for unity is essential. Many spouses may achieve worldly progress—degrees, employment, possessions—but without mutual love and peace, true prosperity shall not be found.

A grievous thing it is when one spouse useth the other—for money, for advantage, even for physical desire. Such behaviour is not Christian marriage. Each must seek the other's benefit above his own.

If the husband—being the leader—striveth continually to love his wife in deed, and the wife striveth continually to honour her husband, then both are serving one another, and the marriage groweth strong.

But if only one laboureth while the other refuseth, then the one who laboureth shall at last become weary, and the end thereof is strife and separation.

The Mystery of Marriage

Thus we read verse 31: *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."*

Paul quoteth from Genesis, even the same Scripture that the Lord Jesus cited in Matthew 19 and Mark 10.

Then Paul saith, *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

The husband representeth Christ; the wife representeth the Church. This is difficult for the world to understand, but God hath revealed it thus.

Marriage as a Covenant

In his book *This Momentary Marriage*, Pastor John Piper declareth that this verse employeth **covenantal language**. When a man leaveth his father and mother and cleaveth unto his wife, becoming one flesh, this manifesteth **the covenant** between them.

Thus, Christian marriage is fundamentally **the keeping of covenant**.

When we speak of covenant-keeping, we often think only of sexual fidelity—namely, that the husband betray not his wife with another woman, and the wife betray not her husband with another man...

THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The Boundaries of the Covenant

To maintain a faithful bond with one's husband and not betray him is likewise included within the covenant. These are the boundaries of the relationship. Keeping these outward boundaries is comparatively easy; but to walk daily in love one toward another, and to honour one another, is also part of covenant-faithfulness. This latter matter is far more challenging. I have seen husbands and wives who have never betrayed one another with any man or woman outside; in this outward sense they have kept the covenant. Yet in their daily life the covenant of love and of honour is sorely lacking. Thus, the practical and daily keeping of the covenant—covenant fidelity—is the harder work.

The Cutting of the Covenant

In the Old Testament the phrase was not “to make a covenant,” but “*to cut a covenant*.” When two parties entered into a covenant, they took an animal, slew it, and laid the pieces over against each other. Then both partners, joining hands, walked between the pieces of the slaughtered beast and declared, “*If either of us break this covenant, let the same fate befall him as hath befallen this slain creature*.” Thus a covenant was for life, and it was taken with great solemnity. This was called *the cutting of the covenant*.

The marriage bond between husband and wife is also a cutting of the covenant, or in modern speech, the making and keeping of a covenant. And it consisteth not only in remaining faithful against any third person—which is necessary—but also in daily faithfulness one toward another by love and honour.

The Commandment to Husbands

The commandment for husbands to love their wives is given many times more than the commandment for wives to submit unto their husbands. Why? Because if a husband desire to assert that God hath appointed him the head, the Scripture repeatedly asketh, “*Art thou fulfilling the responsibility of the head?*”

In Christian marriage, the role of the husband as head of the wife and of the children is not lordship, nor the exercising of dominance or authority for pride's sake; but rather **sacrificial service**. For Christ is the model, and what did Christ do? He said, “*I am among you as He that serveth*,” and upon the Cross He offered His life, giving Himself as a sacrifice, leaving an example of service.

Thus in verse 25 it is written, “*Husbands, love your wives.*” In verse 28, “*Love your wives as your own bodies.*” Again in that same verse, “*He that loveth his wife loveth himself.*” And in verse 33, “*Let every one of you so love his wife even as himself.*”

The Commandment to Wives

And the wife is exhorted to see that she reverence her husband. As In First Peter, chapter three and verse six, Sarah is given as an example, who revered Abraham—that is, she honoured and respected him. So likewise should the wife honour her husband and show him respect.

The Four Seasons of Marriage

Marriage hath various stages. It hath been said that marriage passeth through four “C’s.” The first is **Charm**, the early days wherein both seem exceedingly pleasant unto each other. But after a while, when the true personalities appear, the second stage ariseth—**Conflict**. Many couples cannot pass beyond this stage; and after six months, or one year, or three years, the marriage endeth in separation.

The third stage is **Compromise**, wherein most marriages in the world abide. In Punjabi it is said: “*Guzāra kar*”—do thy best to get by. This is the stage of giving and taking, quarrelling sometimes, reconciling sometimes, each bearing with the other because “there is no choice.” This is not the will of God.

The fourth stage is **Consensus**, or harmony, wherein both listen one to another, both understand one another, both honour one another, and their personalities begin to integrate. They become a well-integrated couple, knit together. This doth not happen in a single day; it remaineth the work of a lifetime.

The Third Person Who Must Be Present

I earlier stated that no third person should enter into a marriage. Yet according to Holy Scripture there is one Third Person who must be present—and that is God. God is the One Third Person who must be in your marriage; besides Him no third person ought to enter.

The Book of Ecclesiastes, in another context, speaketh thus (4:9–12): “*Two are better than one; for they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe unto him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*”

The husband is one strand, the wife the second, and God is the third. And the marriage that hath God at its very centre shall stand firm and remain strong. And by “having God in the marriage” we mean not only reading Scripture and praying, but also that God’s values and God’s teachings be woven into the marriage itself.

