

Ministry of a Wife and Ministry of a Husband

Purpose:

- 1. To consider the reality that healthy marriages lead to healthy congregations. Therefore, congregations are responsible for equipping couples for their ministries to each other.**
- 2. To recognize that trusting the lavish love and grace of Christ, seeing oneself “in Christ”, gives spouses a foundation for how they are to relate to each other.**
- 3. Humanly speaking, a wife is equal to her husband. In her reverence to Christ, she is to step back and support him in the headship office he has been given.**
- 4. Husbands have the responsibilities to be leaders in their marriages and to love their wives so they reach their potential.**
- 5. Children who grow up in a home where mom and dad put their relationship to each other in first place will usually do fine.**

How key are the marriages in a congregation to the life of the congregation?

Ephesians 4:11-12 says pastors and teachers of a church are to equip members for their ministries. Paul knows if this happens, it is going to build up the community of faith. Many people faithfully carrying out their own ministries will surely add vigor and integrity to the congregation. It will also mean many more people will have a significant part to play in the life of the congregation. Members will be mobilized. They will recognize that being out on the playing field and doing what they can will make a real difference in what unity and impact the congregation can have. Each ministry is like a particular muscle in the body which empowers the body to make certain movements it would not make otherwise. If a body has all its muscles and ligaments doing their job, then the whole body of Christ which is the church, will function fully as it was created to do.

So, if we begin naming specific ministries, we come first to **Ephesians 5:21-33**. Here Paul goes back to a stabilizing ministry that is the foundation for almost everything that builds up a congregation. We are talking about the ministries of a wife and a husband and their relationship to each other. Imagine if you will, that a type of liquid acid is poured around the base of a tree. As this liquid seeps into the ground, it eats away at the roots of the tree and renders them lifeless, unable to stabilize the tree or provide nourishing sap to its trunk and branches. What would happen to that tree? Would this not kill the tree? Being rootless, could not a strong wind blow it over? Now, most of us have never considered that married lives are like roots of trees - but doesn't it make sense? If marriages in a congregation are healthy, will they not give vigor and stability to the congregation and to the children in their homes? On the other hand, if those same marriages are contentious or lifeless, how much of an effect will they have on the capacity of a congregation to be salt and light to its children, to its wholesomeness, to its influence on other members and to the community? Everything is connected



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and, in this case, the unity of the family and vibrancy of the congregation is at stake. As Paul Tournier said in Session One, the very wellbeing and wholesomeness of their children is also at stake.

Discussion Questions: *Even though we often overlook it, how important do you believe what is going on between wives and husbands in a congregation has an effect on the life of their congregation? What makes you say that? How worthwhile is it that we equip couples in ways that strengthen their marriages and their communications with one another, while also fostering their love for each other?*

What Makes It So Important to Understand Who We Are When Entering into Marriage?

Now when we read what Paul is saying in Ephesians 5:21-33, we find this is a passage that for the casual observer is often misunderstood. Some people have interpreted it as a put down of the wife, supporting a dominating and tyrannical attitude on the part of the husband. Read on and discover this is neither its intent nor what Paul is saying. Some have been offended thinking it says a wife should obey her husband. It does not say that either. So we need to examine it closely.

First of all, the context is extremely important. We don't want to forget who Ephesians 1-3 says Christians are. They were in God's plan before the world was created. They became Christians through no merit of their own but out of the lavish love and grace brought to them through Jesus' completed work on the cross and his victory over death in his resurrection. They have been adopted into the family of God and have been given eternal life, their sins are forgiven. So, the Holy Spirit has brought to them a recognition of who they are. Yet, they need continuous prayer so the eyes of their hearts can see the hope they have been given, the unbelievable inheritance, the power they have to live the Christian life, that same power by which God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles have equal acceptance and standing before God. In the same way, wives and husbands have equal acceptance and standing before God because of God's decision to be gracious to sinners through what Christ did.

Having been so gifted by this amazing grace, wives and husbands both now have good reason to be submissive to one another as a fitting way of showing reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21). So right away, we see that the way they relate to each other finds its source in the person they have become. It stems from who they are in the family of God through Christ.

Discussion Questions: *What is being said here might be difficult to comprehend. How would you articulate this in your own words? How does the message of Ephesians give a spouse a way to see themselves? A way to see their spouse?*

How Are Wives to be Positioned Within a Christian Marriage?

So, what is expected of wives? They are to look to their husbands and be subject to him as they are subject to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. Here is where we must put on our thinking caps. What does this mean? Martin Luther made a helpful

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distinction. He saw a major gap between a person and an office. When we are born, we are equally human with all other human beings. But as we grow, we see some distinctions. There is doctor and patient, parent and child. Even though none is inferior or superior to the other in terms of their humanity, we recognize different people hold different offices. Someone has to be the captain of the team, the leader of a tour group. In a marriage, someone has to be the person where “the buck stop here”. A wife is called upon to look to her husband as the leader God has given the family and she does that as a way of serving Christ. This does not mean she has no responsibilities. No, she is there to hold the family together and tend to the needs of each member.

Discussion Question: *What would be some reasons why it would be good to have a leader in a marriage relationship? How comfortable are women to see it that way? How would you see the wife as being the one to hold the family together and tend to the needs of each member?*

How is a Husband to See Himself and Be Within a Christian Marriage?

Now obviously a husband might start thinking of himself as the boss, running the show. But the passage goes on. The husband is told to love his wife as Christ loves the church. Here is where the passage rejects all casual or secular thinking and rejects all temptations a husband might have to dominate or abuse his wife. Yes, God has given him the authority to be the leader in the marriage. What does this entail? The key here comes by looking at who a husband has become, recognizing the person of Christ as his leader.

If we look to **Mark 10:35-45**, we find two disciples asking to be the ones who will be at Jesus’ right hand and his left hand in the kingdom. In other words, they want to be in a superior role over the others. The other disciples are indignant, just as a wife might be if subjected to a minor and constantly-giving-in role in the marriage. To settle this clash, Jesus draws all the disciples together and says, “If you want to be great among you, then you must be servant of all. Whoever wants to be first needs to become like a slave of the group.” Jesus then makes all this real by saying, “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

What do we have here? When a husband is given the leadership role, he is to use that office as a way of loving his wife, serving her, looking to her as the one for whom he will make all decisions that will benefit her and build her up. That may well work out for the best if he is listening to her, consulting with her, caring for her as one would care for one’s own body. So these two words, “submitting” and “loving”, come to be almost identical—doing what one can to give life and honor to the other.

If the husband is the head of the family, that means he is responsible to find ways to make the marriage work for his spouse and their relationship. He is also then responsible in finding ways to have a whole and stable family, loving, considerate, listening to one another, being wise in their speaking, having fun in their playing. A husband brings strength to his wife and family.



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Here is an example of what is being said in this passage. If we watch a professional football or baseball game on TV, for what reason does the camera often show the coach or the manager? Is it not because whatever is going on in the game, is somehow what is going on in that coach's or manager's head? The decisions each is making will give their team a chance to win. The players are very important, but it is with the coach or manager where the buck stops. They have to figure it out. If the team constantly loses, it will be the coach or manager who gets fired.

***Discussion Questions:** Before a husband begins to figure out what his role is in a marriage, what does this Scripture ask of him in terms of how he is to relate to his wife? What makes it hard to get our heads around this way of seeing marriage? From what is being said in Ephesians, seek to describe in your own words what would it be like to have a husband step up and be the leader he is asked to be here? In what way is the coach or manager the key person in the game? What do you think happens as the kids see the interactions taking place between their parents?*

Summary:

- 1. To build up the body of Christ, church leaders are responsible to train and equip couples to minister to each other in a healthy and supportive way.**
- 2. The starting point for a Christian marriage is to receive the grace of God and to relate to each other as ones who have been loved and forgiven by Christ.**
- 3. A wife is to recognize the headship of her husband and out of reverence for Christ, support him in the challenging office or role he has been given.**
- 4. A husband carries the main weight of the marriage's healthiness. He is to exemplify servant leadership that treasures his wife as Christ has loved and treasured his body, the church.**
- 5. Children mature best when they take their clue on the way to live by witnessing what is going on between their parents.**

"It's amazing how one day someone walks into your life, and you cannot remember how you ever lived without them."—Unknown

"A happy marriage is a long conversation which always seems too short."—Andre Maurois

"My husband has made me laugh. Wiped my tears. Hugged me tight. Watched me succeed. Seen me fail. Kept me strong. My husband is a promise that I will have a friend forever."—Unknown



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“Great marriages don’t happen by luck or by accident. They are the result of a consistent investment of time, thoughtfulness, forgiveness, affection, prayer, mutual respect, and a rock-solid commitment between a husband and a wife.” —Dave Willis

Supplemental Material Google:

Gary Smalley videos: see ‘*Hidden Keys to Loving Relationship*’. Very good to watch.

See ‘*Six Reasons for Putting Your Marriage Before Your Kids*’.

Closing Prayer: Suggestions:

1. Praise God for the gift of marriage.
2. Ask for understanding and living out what has been talked about.
3. Ask for the presence of the true servant leader, Christ, within our marriages.
4. Ask God for healing and reconciliation to take place in hurting or contentious marriages within our community.
5. Pray for all single parents that they might find caring support as they manage their lives and families by themselves.