

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 22)

Ephesians 5:22-33

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In these days, when it's common to see churches where women are more numerous and prominent than men, and families where the wife is the spiritual pillar, it's good to see so many spiritually strong husbands and fathers at CCGC this Father's Day. By God's providence our passage today speaks to the men in our congregation, those who are charged with spiritual leadership in their families.

Ephesians 5:22-33 follows the last "How to walk" statement, where Paul urges us to walk as wise (v. 15). We saw last time that those who are wise are filled with the Spirit, joyfully praising God and giving thanks to Him, and finally submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (v. 21). Paul elaborates on this last point in today's passage, and we must remember that these instructions are a part of God's wisdom. If we want to be wise, we must learn to think like God does, by studying His word. We shouldn't obey God only when we agree with His instruction. We mustn't dismiss God's word as irrelevant or culturally inappropriate whenever it is not aligned with how we think or how we were brought up. Let us pay attention to what God says and take it seriously.

Paul's instruction to wives admittedly seems outdated, and there is a healthy debate about this topic. One side holds to Egalitarianism, that men and women have equal value and also equal and interchangeable roles with no qualitative or quantitative differences, based on such passages such as Galatians 3:28 and 1 Peter 3:18. The other side holds to Complementarianism, the idea that men and women are equal in value, importance, and in terms of salvation, but have different roles in the home, just like the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in the sense that they are all in nature God, but they have different roles. Today's passage tends to support the complementarian viewpoint.

Verse 22 tells wives to submit to their husbands. This is the same word used in v. 21, but Paul is elaborating on the specific direction of submission here. The word for submit is *hupatasso*, which means "to place oneself under." It doesn't imply that women are in any way inferior or less important than men, but rather that they should make a deliberate decision to voluntarily place themselves under the spiritual leadership of their husbands. Although it seems old-fashioned for us today, back in Paul's time, society was patriarchal and it was a given that

wives would submit to their husbands. There's almost no need to Paul to mention it, except that he adds the phrase "as to the Lord." He gives a new perspective, attitude, and motivation for doing what wives have already been doing. Wives should submit to their husbands because of the relationship they have with Jesus.

What it exactly means to submit as to the Lord is vague, perhaps on purpose. It's not necessarily about which chores wives should do, or whether wives or husbands should be the primary bread winner, or even who gets the final word in arguments. It's more about attitude than behavior, how wives should regard their husbands. In my family we do chores based on skill and my wife has more income than I do, but she still regards me as the head of the household. It's my responsibility to stand in front, to lead, to be the protector. In Genesis 32, Jacob provides a bad example of a husband. He cowardly makes his least favorite wives go ahead of him, putting them in harm's way, when he goes out to meet Esau. Husbands are supposed to lead, to be in front, to protect. And wives should regard their husbands as leaders and protectors.

Though many focus on the instruction to wives, this passage is primarily about husbands. The section about husbands (vv. 25-33) has three times as many verses and six times as many words as the section about wives. And although wives were already submitting to husbands, it's likely that Paul's instruction to husbands was not as widely practiced. In vv. 25-27, Paul uses Jesus as an example of how husbands should treat their wives. Just as Jesus sacrificed Himself for the Church, husbands should sacrifice themselves for their families. Jesus sanctified and cleansed us with water with the word (through the word of confession of faith in Jesus, He washes us). Jesus makes us holy and blameless (same phrase used in 1:4) because He has our ultimate eternal good in mind. Likewise husbands should have the ultimate good of their wives in mind. They should selflessly carry their wives' burdens and put themselves in front, protecting their wives from danger. In vv. 28-30, Paul says that husbands should care for wives as they care for themselves. All the care and attention you give your own body, you should give also to your wife. During weddings, husbands vow to be faithful, to cherish and protect their wives. Is this your attitude this Father's Day? This is God's wisdom. Examine your own life and your attitude towards your spouse, and continue to walk in wisdom.