

Ephesians 5:22-33 – Husbands and Wives

Paul is teaching what belonging to Christ should do to our lives, day by day. He is teaching us how to use each day and hour for his glory. In verse 21 he told us to submit to one another. We all have different positions in life. We should seek to please Christ in that position. From 5:22 onwards he speaks to different situations: marriages, parents and children, masters and slaves. In this section he talks to husbands and wives.

1. Duties of wives (v-22-24, 33)

The duty: The duty of wives is to submit to their husbands. This means to obey them, as their head (v23). It is easy to understand, if not easy to do! Paul did not say all women should submit to all men, but wives to their own husbands. So if you are not yet married, choose your husband wisely!

The standard: True submission is joyful, quick and complete. It should be done as if serving Christ. This is how God made marriage; he made Eve (Genesis 2) to be a helper to Adam, an aid, not a rival or a master over him. A wife should obey in everything that is lawful, i.e. is not a sin forbidden by God's law. This does not mean "become a servant or robot"; if we read Proverbs 31 or 1 Samuel 25 we see examples of wives taking big initiatives.

The reasons: Men and women are equal, being made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). The reason for submission is not inferiority, or culture or tradition either. It is because it pleases Jesus. It is because in marriage we are joined; two become one; your husbands is "your own husband" (v22). It is God's appointment, and the way in which we fulfil are calling.

2. Duties of husbands (v25-32)

The duty: Husbands are to love their wives. Love is not a feeling, but it means self-giving – giving up yourself for another, just as Christ gave himself up for the church even to death on the cross. Authority is not given to be abused, but to serve the people under that authority. It is a great responsibility, and God will require a strict accounting from us for how we used it.

The standard: The standard is the love of Christ. He died so that we could give. He gave everything for the church's life. We must also have total commitment, and make every decision for the good and blessing of our wives. Christ is gentle and patient, and never gives up. We must be the same, not harsh or bitter.

The reasons: In marriage, two become one; our wife is "one flesh" with us (Genesis 2:24). If we care for our wives, we care for ourselves. Our treatment of our wives is our testimony of how we see Christ. Is he harsh and cruel with the church? By our home lives, we either confirm or deny the gospel. What is your home like?

The goal: Christ died to bring the church to perfection and glory. He will not cease until each one of his people is perfected. We too must take total responsibility for our wives and their good. This takes time and self-sacrifice; Christ commands this of us. Whether we obey shows whether we truly believe the gospel or not.