

## **The Godly Family, Pt 1: Christ-Centered Wives (Ephesians 5:18-24)**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on July 28, 2012*

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*The Saturday Evening Post* once published an article entitled “The Seven Ages of the Married Cold.” It surveyed the reactions of a husband to his wife’s colds during their first 7 years of marriage:<sup>1</sup>

The first year: “Sugar dumpling, I’m really worried about my baby girl. You’ve got a bad snuffle, and there’s no telling about these things with all this strep throat going around. I’m putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food’s lousy, but I’ll be bringing your meals in ... I’ve already got it all arranged with the floor superintendent.”

2nd year: “Listen, darling, I don’t like the sound of that cough. I called Doc Miller and asked him to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl, please? Just for papa.”

The third year: “Maybe you’d better lie down, honey; nothing like a little rest when you’d feel lousy. I’ll bring you something to eat. Have you got any canned soup?”

4th year: “Now look, dear, be sensible. After you’ve fed the kids, washed the dishes, and finished the floor, you’d better lie down.”

The 5th year: “Why don’t you take a couple of aspirin?”

The 6th year: “I wish you’d just gargle or something, instead of sitting around all evening barking like a seal!”

7th year: ‘...stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia?’

The decline of marriage as seen through the common cold. A funny look at a not-so-funny reality that is not so uncommon. The declining of marriages is not a new thing. Husbands often haven’t loved their wives sacrificially in history as Christ calls them to. Wives often haven’t loved their husbands submissively. It all started out great at first for the very first couple. It was literally the perfect marriage of a literally perfect couple, Adam and Eve.

Look at v. 31. It’s a direct quotation from Gen. 2 when God joined the 1st man/woman together in history, a marriage made in heaven ... but there was trouble in paradise when Adam failed to be a head of leadership and protection to his wife, which is why they and we needed Christ and the gospel. Through the gospel marriages can be ‘alive in Him my living head, and clothed in righteousness divine.’<sup>2</sup>

As we saw last week, Jesus came to be the head and husband that Adam wasn’t, to a bride/church, the Father gives to the Son (v. 32). I want to start today in the context of the text he quotes from (turn to Gen. 2) to set the foundation. Headship/submission isn’t based on culture, it’s based on God’s creation of man and woman as the foundation for everything Paul says about headship, submission. Husband-wife roles weren’t created by sin, only corrupted by sin. Genesis shows God’s design, what happened, why we need the gospel in marriage, why we need the Spirit’s filling, why we need Christ to come and be central, as Paul applies it to wives in Eph 5.

Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24 in Eph. 5 but then he says this is a mystery that's actually about Christ and His church. The end of Genesis 2:18 says God created woman in marriage to be man's "helper" – man needs help. The word *helper* doesn't mean inferior – God Himself is called a "helper" with this same word in the OT. But it's one who comes alongside to help, like the Holy Spirit does for us, and in Eph 5:18-24 it's the Spirit who comes alongside and also inside wives to fill them to fulfill their God-given support role.

The word "suitable" in my Bible is also translated "comparable" in NKJV or "who corresponds to him" (NET) or "as his counterpart" (YLT), or "companion" in others, or even better, "complementary"

Not complimentary, saying compliments, but complementary. Bruce Ware explains:

*Complementarian* [complement, i.e., completing in sense of fitting counterpart in Genesis 2:18] is a label commonly used for those who believe that the Scriptures teach that men and women are equal in Christ [Gal. 3:28] but have different, complementary roles in marriage [Eph. 5:22-33] and the church [1 Tim. 2:8-15].

*Egalitarian* [from French *egal*, equality] is a label commonly used for those who believe that the Scripture teaches the *equality* of men and women in a way that minimizes or denies gender-specific roles [submission/headship] in marriage or the church.'<sup>3</sup>

Mary Kassian writes: 'I'm a complementarian. And I helped coin the term ... the label "complementarian" has only been in use for about 25 years. It was coined by a group of scholars who got together to try and come up with a word to describe someone who ascribes to the historic, biblical idea that male and female are equal, but different. The need for such a label arose in response to the proposition that equality means role-interchangeability (egalitarianism)—a concept that was first forwarded and popularized in Evangelical circles in the 1970s and 80s by "Biblical Feminists" [those who use the Bible to try to argue against male leadership/headship in marriage or the church] ... In emulation of the popular "for Dummies" series of instructional books, I'll give you a "Complementarianism for Dummies" primer on the intended meaning of the word.'<sup>4</sup>

### **#1 – It's About Complementing Not Complimenting**

Complement = completing counterpart (Gen. 2:18 "a *suitable/fit/corresponding* helper"). Mary Kassian writes: 'If you hear someone tell you that complementarity means [to a wife] ... chuck your brain, tolerate abuse, watch "Leave it to Beaver" re-runs, bury your gifts, deny your personality, and bobble-head nod "yes" to everything men say, don't believe her. That's a straw (wo)man misrepresentation. It's not complementarianism.'

### **#2 – It's Not About Perpetuating a 1950s Stereotype**

'June Cleaver is ... NOT the definition of complementarity ... a traditional, American, cultural TV stereotype... Complementarians believe that the Bible's principles supersede tradition [and changing culture]. They can be applied in every time and culture.'

### **#3 – It's Not About One Sex/Gender Being More Privileged ...**

'Men are not superior to women—women are not the "second sex." Though men have a responsibility to exercise headship in their homes, and in the church family, Christ revolutionized the definition of what that means [Eph. 5:25-30, Mark 10:42-44].

Authority is not the right to rule—it's the responsibility to serve. We rejected the term "hierarchicalism" because people associate it with an inherent, self-proclaimed right to rule.'

**#4 – It's Not About Guys Having Right to Rule Over/Oppress** 'Technically, "patriarchy" simply means ... the father is the head of the family [ex: patriarchs in OT, Abraham, etc.]. But since the 1970s, feminists have redefined the historic use of the term, and attributed negative connotations to it. Nowadays, people regard patriarchy as the *oppressive rule [by] men* ... in which women are put down and squelched. That's why we rejected the term "patriarchalism." Complementarians stand against the oppression of women. We want to see women flourish, and we believe they do so when men and women live according to God's Word.'

#### **#5 – It's Male and Female Reflecting Complementary Truths**

'God created male and female to reflect complementary truths about Jesus. That's the bottom-line meaning of the word. Complementarians believe that males were designed to shine the spotlight on Christ's relationship to the church (and the LORD God's relationship to Christ) in a way that females cannot, and that females were designed to shine the spotlight on the Church's relationship to Christ (and Christ's relationship to the LORD God) in a way that males cannot.' [1 Cor. 11:3 says God is the head of Christ (equal but different role) as a husband is head of his wife]

That's what v. 18 and v. 24 means as Paul quotes it in Ephesians 5. God always had a plan for marriage to reflect Jesus and the church. Satan's plan is to corrupt this picture and our God-given roles. As Satan did with Eve in Gen. 3, he now whispers to wives "did God *really* say 'submit to your husbands, make your home a priority?'"

Satan speaks with a forked tongue and sneaks into the homes and hearts of women under the guise of women's "liberation" which is one of his lies that puts women in bondage if they try to be free from what God's Word calls them to do and be. "If you abide in My Word," Jesus says, "You'll know the truth that sets you free."

Genesis 3:15 says the seed of the woman and seed of the serpent would be in perpetual struggle, and in v. 16 it spills into marriage: **3:16** *To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet **your desire will be for your husband**, And he will rule over you."*

What does that mean, "your desire will be for your husband?" The same phrase is used in Genesis 4:7, where God says to Cain "...*sin is crouching at your door; **and its desire is for you**, but you must master it.*" Sin wants to dominate and control you, but don't let it.

Same essential phrase in Hebrew for a wife's sinful desire toward for her husband, to dominate and control him. Don't let her, lead her. In Gen 3:17, God judges Adam because he was listening to his wife, rather than leading his wife. He listened to her and followed her into sin by what she said, instead of leading her by what God said. This was also a problem with Abraham in Genesis 16, when Sarah tells him to pursue a child another way than God's way, and Gen 16:2 says he "listened to the voice of" his wife (like Adam).

In Hebrew, “to listen to the voice of” is an idiom meaning follow and obey, which we’re called to do with God, but not our wives. It is different than listening in the sense of paying attention to, giving consideration to our wife (we should, I sinned here and confessed to Jaime this week, not listening because my mind was elsewhere).

In Gen 3:17,16:2 the problem isn’t physically hearing or having a conversation, it’s roles being reversed where the man followed and obeyed his wife, listening uncritically to her word above God’s and then being led sinfully by her instead of being her leader spiritually

This is a problem with many marriages and men, and is again why we need Christ and the grace in the gospel to reverse sin’s reversal. C.S. Lewis describes humans in the Chronicles of Narnia as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and Aslan must defeat the evil one before Narnia can be restored to its original intention. It’s a picture of Christ pictured in the book of Revelation as a Lion, also a Lamb who was slain for us, who willingly submitted Himself to death by sinful men. His gospel empowers wives submitting to sinful men, and husbands to lay down their lives for sinful wives in gospel love

So as we go back to Ephesians 5, it’s important to keep in mind God’s original design and the corruption of our natures due to sin, and the Christ who delivers us.

<sup>22</sup> *Wives, be subject to [other versions “submit to”] your own husbands, as to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* <sup>24</sup> *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

It’s important to not only have a big picture context of redemptive history, it’s important also always to notice the context in this book:

1. **This text presupposes gospel submission first (Eph 1-3)**
2. **It assumes you understand Christ’s headship (1:21-23)**

Some “Christian feminists” argue headship doesn’t mean authority but we have to look at how Paul uses the term headship of Christ in Eph 1:21, look at the language in 1:21. Christ is: <sup>21</sup> *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* <sup>22</sup> *And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,* <sup>23</sup> *which is His body ...*

It’s the very same Greek words *subjection/submission* and *head* and *church* and *body*, the exact same language is applied to wives:

**5:22** *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord [title of authority].* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* <sup>24</sup> *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything*[exact parallel to 1:22]

### 3. 5:21 is part of a far bigger theme: glorifying God (3:21)

Ephesians 3:21 *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called [gospel of Eph 1-3], <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance [or forbearance] for one another in love ... [God's glory is highest in us when we are lowest in submission to each other]*

There needs to a higher motive for a wife than the good of her husband – the ultimate much higher motive is the glory of God. It can't be based on whether her husband acts worthy of her respect or submission, it must be to walk worthy of the glorious calling she has in the gospel of a God gracious to a sinner like her so she can. It's not dependent on a wife receiving honor she feels she needs by her human husband, it's about her seeking to honor her divine one.

Some wives and moms work hard in homeschooling, homekeeping and having a picture-perfect family, but those images can become idols, images graven in the mind that need to bow in submission to Christ. And as wives humbly admit their imperfections or legalism or just lack of gospel focus, and submit to imperfect husbands for Christ's sake, they picture the only perfect family: God, Father/Son/Spirit, w/ a heavenly bride saved from sin to glorify and enjoy him

### 4. Submission in Eph 5:21-25 is part of the Spirit's filling

- a. "Be filled" in 5:18 is the only command in v. 19-24
- b. 4 verbs in v. 19-21 are participles/results of v. 18, speaking, singing, saying thanks, submitting, v. 21
- c. The power for submission is God's Spirit in v. 18. If you're filled with pride you won't be filled with this power. God's Spirit and stubbornness don't mix
- d. If you're not doing the other things in v. 19-20, you will struggle with the last of the 4 verbs: submitting
- e. Specifically, a praising heart in v. 19, thankfulness in v. 20 is essential to the submissiveness in v. 21.

It's easier to be submissive in everything (v. 24) if you're thankful in everything (v. 20). Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson: 'Giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful, it is a matter of obedience.'<sup>5</sup> I've also heard her share what helped her be thankful was reading a book called *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Joni saw her paralysis as part of God's purpose, providence in 'all things' (1:11)

Submitting to God's sovereignty in Eph 1:11 helps submit in 5:21, and our thankfulness in v. 20 helps our submissiveness in v. 21-22.

Spurgeon quoted John Bunyan that "the very chickens shame us if we are ungrateful, for they do not take a drink of water without lifting up their heads, as if in thankfulness for the refreshing draught ... [Those] who are determined to murmur and to complain of God's dealings with them are sure to find plenty of things to complain of; while those who are of a thankful spirit will see reasons and occasions for gratitude in everything that happens."<sup>6</sup>

If you are spirit-filled (v. 18), speaking psalms and other truths from the Scripture or Scripture-based songs to each other, and singing praises to God in your heart (v. 19), and saying thanks to God constantly (v. 20), it's not a big jump to submission (v.21-22), thankful, even joyful submission. Piper: 'The only submission that fully reflects the worth and glory of the king is glad submission ... when the kingdom is a treasure, submission is a pleasure.'<sup>7</sup>

***What submission is NOT:***

1. Slavish obedience – chapter 6 uses different word for “obey” in addressing how slaves are to obey and children are to obey
2. To all men – Eph 5:22 says it is “to your *own* husbands” only, and the Greek text has special emphasis on this word
3. To only godly or wise husbands (1 Peter 3) or if you agree. Peter talks about unsaved, ungodly or unreasonable husbands even, and the principle of submission applies to unwise ones. Submitting is easy if you agree, but that's not submission's test – the test is when you disagree and discuss but then yield the decision to the one in authority, that's true submission.
4. To commit a sinful act (lie, cheat). There's a time to obey God rather than man (Acts 5), but still respecting the human authority in the process (Eph 5:33). As we submit to Christ's commands, we are not to submit to a lesser authority command for us to disobey Him. One can seek help if abused from higher authorities we're also submit to (Rom 13, Mt 18)
5. Not something husbands are to force – the Greek verb is in a middle voice, which means it is voluntarily putting yourself under someone. Husbands aren't told to make wives submit.
6. Inferiority – Jesus Himself submitted to mere human parents (Luke 2:51) who He was greater than, but submitted to them
7. Not mutual submission - (wives to husbands, husbands submit to wives). Some good teachers use the term, egalitarians use it to deny male headship. But when 5:21 says we're to submit to one another, the general principle, it then goes on to give 3 specific applications: wives submit to husbands (5:22), kids submit to parents (6:1), slaves submit to masters (6:5). In the structure and grammar, Paul calls 3 groups to submit to their God-appointed authorities or leadership, and he calls their 3 leaders (husbands, fathers, masters) to love those they lead.

Paul does *not* mean by Ephesians 5:21 that now husbands are to submit to wives, and children are to submit to parents, and masters are to submit to slaves, or that Christ submits to His bride?! The egalitarian mutual submission idea doesn't work with the text, context, or meaning of the word “submit,” and it messes with the imagery of head and body and Christ and His bride. Yes, a husband is to live with a wife considerately, sensitively (1 Pet 3:7), lovingly, like Christ with His bride and body He is head over (Eph 5:25-32), but the actual Greek word “submit” is never used in the NT for a husband to his wife. The Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has an excellent article on ‘The Myth of Mutual Submission’ in Ephesians 5 for your further study.<sup>8</sup>

***What submission IS:***

1. Putting yourself under/yielding to the headship of another

The “head” language in v. 23 is connected to the body at the end of v. 23. There can only be one head – a body with 2 heads is scary! I can’t help but think of the two-headed monster on Sesame Street, the fuzzy purple puppets who appear on the “journey to Ernie” part and Big Bird asks both heads which way Ernie went and they point in opposite directions (or so, I’ve heard). That’s what happens in some marriages; there’s not 1 head, wife going different directions!

The head gives direction or leadership to the body under it. That’s the image and if the head wants its body to go one way and there’s no response or it does something different, that’s a dysfunction or a disease or serious problem in a human body, or also in a marriage.

Some egalitarians will respond that yes, marriage needs a head, but the word ‘head’ here doesn’t mean in charge or any real authority. In other words, yes, marriage isn’t a two-headed muppet monster, but some explain man’s headship almost like a puppet that a wife moves or manipulates wherever she wants. He’s the figurehead but *she’s the neck that turns the head*, is how it’s sometimes said. That is not the biblical image in v. 23 for a wife in marriage or a church to its head – we don’t make our head Jesus do what we want, we’re to submit to His wants. We can talk to Him in prayer, and know He hears our concerns, and then we submit our will to His. That’s the picture and pattern for wives, v. 23-24, as the church is to its Head.

Another way evangelical feminists try to evade the clear meaning of this passage is a little more sophisticated or complicated: they say “head” in v. 23 doesn’t imply authority, it just means ‘source.’ Dr. Wayne Grudem took that to task, and examined 2,336 usages of this word for ‘head’ in ancient Greek sources that were before and leading up to the writing of the New Testament, and none of these sources ever gives a clear example of the meaning “source”<sup>9</sup>

Headships, as we saw in Eph 1 does include authority, but it does not necessarily imply inferiority of the one under it. Think in the U.S. of the head over a branch of government or any level of our armed forces – it’s not superiority, it’s structure, order. And this ties in with the word ‘submit’ in v. 24 – it was the Grk term in the day for a soldier putting himself under a leader or head. The whole structure and order breaks down without submission. If there is a “soldier’s liberation movement” with them rejecting any headship or authority, saying “why do *we* have to submit, you’re not any better just because the commander gives us different roles, we’re not gonna take it, we’re not gonna take it anymore!” That so-called “soldier’s liberation” movement will unravel the army, or the Lord’s army in a church or a family if we depart from submission and God’s order.

2. Submission is a “freeing disposition to affirm, receive...leadership”<sup>10</sup>

The gospel gives true liberation from sin and the shackles of our culture, and it gives liberation to God’s purpose for us in creation. As we submit to Christ as our head, His truth sets us free. Wives pursuing actions and attitudes of submission, have called it freeing.

One author explains: ‘a disposition to yield to the husband’s authority and an inclination to follow his leadership ... is experienced as freeing ... because it accords with the truth of God’s purpose in creation. It is the truth that frees ... the mature and wise woman does not seek this freedom...to fit her desires. She seeks it by being transformed in the renewal of her desires to fit in with God’s perfect will (Rom 12:2). The greatest freedom is found in being so changed by God’s Spirit that you can do what you [now] love to do and know that it conforms to the [Scriptural] design of God and leads to life and glory ... It is the sometimes painful and exhilarating discovery of God’s power to fight free from the bondage of our sinful selves.’<sup>11</sup>

### 3. From Christ, through Christ, and to Christ

I get this wording from Romans 11:36: *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

In Eph 5:19-25, Christ is all over the passage; from Him, through Him, to Him, in the name of, in the fear of, as, as to, just as Christ. If you count all the references to Lord/Christ by title or pronoun, 10x in v. 19-24 He is referred to: this is all about Him and not us! This is Christ-centered marriage, from Him, through Him, to Him.

FROM CHRIST – in 2 ways, by His enabling and by His example

*By His enabling* – end of v. 23 says He is not only Head but Savior of the body, and in the context of chapter 4, the idea of head and body is that each part that submits to the lead of the head – it’s movement is from the head, from Christ. The strength comes from Christ our head as we respond.

*By His example* – also in the text, in v. 25, His lowering Himself to the point of death for His bride in His love. In context of 4:9, Christ descended all the way to earth in lowliness from highest heaven, He went far lower than the submission He calls us to, and He is our example/enabler

Philippians 2:7 says despite His full equality with God, He *emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant [slave], and being made in the likeness of men.*<sup>8</sup> *Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Submission is from Christ and it is also THROUGH CHRIST:

Philippians 4:13 goes on to say ‘*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*’ [all things includes submission]

The same chapter says that as we submit our anxiety and submit our prayer requests to God with thanksgiving, v. 7:

*‘the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus’* (NKJV)

In this context, v. 21 says it is through the fear of Christ.



It is through a desire to honor and please Him above all.  
Eph 2:7 says His grace/kindness is *through Christ* (KJV)

Submission is from Christ, through Christ, and TO CHRIST:

Eph 5:10 says we seek what is pleasing to the Lord Jesus  
Last 3 words in 5:19, the ultimate focus: *...to the Lord...*  
<sup>22</sup> *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*  
<sup>24</sup> *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives...*

This passage takes us beyond and behind the human man to the only perfect Man or Husband truly worthy, to the Lord.

v. 22 says submit as if doing it “to the Lord,” because you are. Don’t do it “as to *your husband*” only, not because he’s so worthy or deserving, but do it because Jesus is so worthy and deserving obedience. Do it to the Lord, for His glory.

Do it not for the sake of your guy, but for the sake of the gospel. Look beyond your husband’s sin to the cross that Christ submitted Himself to, for sinful husbands and wives

Upward I look and see Him there, Who made an end to all my sin  
Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the just is satisfied, To look on Him and pardon me

We need to look on Christ and pardon, forgive each other.  
And men, we need to help our wives in this by loving and laying down ourselves, like Christ did for His (v. 25, next week, we’re up). The hand that leads us has a nail print in it

*For from Him, through Him, to Him are all things, to Him be glory*

<sup>1</sup> <http://bible.org/article/love-your-wife-sacrificially-ephesians-525-27>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be?”

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Ware, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway Books, 2002), p. 104, 106 f.n.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.girlsgonewise.com/complementarianism-for-dummies/>

<sup>5</sup> As cited by John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 266.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 53, No. 3025.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, v. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, “The Myth of Mutual Submission,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Vol. 1:4 (October 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Multnomah), p. 552-599.

<sup>10</sup> This is part of the definition of femininity in complementarity in below book.

<sup>11</sup> John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway, 1991), p. 38-39.