

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
God's design for the function of family

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. ²⁴ Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. ²⁷ He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ In any case, each one of you also is to love his wife as himself, and each wife is to respect her husband.

—Ephesians 5:22-33 EHV

I'm going to start by looking at the last two verses of Ephesians 5. Paul sums up this relationship between a husband and a wife by writing: **"This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you also is to love his wife as himself, and each wife is to respect her husband."**

Is anybody here surprised by the fact that men and women are different from each other? We are different, aren't we? Of course, we are. When I meet with couples in pre-marital counseling, I usually ask them, "What do you think is the greatest value a woman has in her life?" Almost instantly, but not always, the woman says, "To be loved." Unconditionally. She wants to be loved, not on the basis of her looks, not on the basis of what she does. No. All of those things can and do change. But her greatest value is to know that she is loved unconditionally.

So, then I ask, "What do you think the greatest value is for a man?" Now certainly he needs to be loved, as well, right? But there is even something deeper. He wants to be appreciated, respected, honored. For those of you who are familiar with the book entitled, "Love and Respect," Dr. Eggerichs, the author, references a study when he writes, "In one national study, four hundred men were given a choice between going through two different negative experiences. If they were forced to choose one of the following, which would they prefer to endure? A) to be left alone and unloved in the world; B) to feel inadequate and disrespected by everyone. Seventy-four percent of these men said that if they were forced to choose, they would prefer being alone and unloved in the world. For these men, the greater negative experience for their souls to endure would be to feel inadequate and disrespected by everyone" (Eggerichs, page 90). Men have said, "I would rather live with a wife who respected me but did not love me than live with a wife who loved me but did not respect me." Now, it's not that men are indifferent to love. They know they need love, but they often need to feel respected even more than to feel loved. Not in a "yes, sir, aye-aye, sir" type of manner, but in a way that he's looked up to. This is someone who has my respect unconditionally.

So, look at how God speaks to these needs we have in our lives. **"This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you also is to love his wife as himself, and each wife is to respect her husband."** Husbands, God has given *you* to fulfill a great value for your wife. And wives, God has given *you* to fulfill a great value for your husband. It's a beautiful design. Paul explains God's design for the function of the family.

And he starts out by addressing wives. He says, **"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything."** Now remember, these are *God's* words. Paul is speaking with the same authority as when he taught about the doctrines of election and grace and salvation in the other parts of this letter to the Ephesians. These are *God's* words. So, you know they are good for you and for the function of your family.

Wives, it's for the sake of order or function that God wants you to line yourself up under your husband. This isn't about value. It's not about worth. It's about function. It's about how your marriage is going to work. For example, this is no different than what the pilot of a Boeing 747 does when he yields to the ground crew on the tarmac. The pilot does not submit to the crewman's outstretched hand because he is inferior or weaker or less valuable. No, he yields because if he doesn't, he'll plow into an oncoming airplane or tanker. The pilot submits to the ground crew. This isn't about value. It's about function.

So, God calls wives to submit to their husbands. A wife submits to her husband when she respects him and acknowledges him as her God-given head. The two need each other. My head needs my body. My body needs my head. It's how it works.

Now, I would have to say that the focus God gives to husbands is an even greater push than what he gives to wives. Look at what God says, **“Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as (picture an equal sign=) Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands have an obligation to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. To be sure, no one has ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.”**

Can I give you an illustration for this? Imagine that this is a Faberge Egg worth \$33 million. (Actually, Darlean Worischeck made this one, so it is worth *more* than \$33 million dollars. But go with me on this.) This valuable egg is fragile, and it can easily break. What if I told you that I was going to give you this egg and let you keep it for me? Only, you can't lock it away in some cabinet. I want you to carry this egg around with you all the time. How would that change your life?

You couldn't go golfing or change the oil on your car. You might damage this treasure. No more baseball or basketball for you. Your whole life would change. Your whole life would revolve around this \$33 million treasure that you are holding in your hands.

Husbands, God gave you a tremendous treasure when he gave you your wife. Proverbs 31:10 says, **“Who can find a wife with strong character (literally a woman with strength)? Her value is greater than that of gems.”** In other words, she is priceless. Right? Only God himself can occupy a greater place in your heart than your wife. Reflect on this in your life.

Your wife is more important than your job, your fishing, your golfing, your friends. It doesn't mean that you can't fish or play golf once in a while. But none of these activities can take priority over your wife's well-being. With every decision you make in your life, you will ask yourself first, “How does this affect my wife?” Before you turn on that television set, or take that drink, or buy a new toy for the garage, you ask, “How will this affect my wife?” And if you don't know, then ask her! Right?

Husbands, you have a high calling from God. Your model, your equal sign, is Christ. The way you love your wife equals the way Christ loved the church. And you know how he loved us. Even when we weren't very agreeable. Even when we were downright nasty. Even when we were still sinners, Christ died for us! Husbands, love your wives in that way.

And dear Christian wife, think of what that means for you. Husbands, if I take my \$33 million *Worischeck* Egg and put it in your hands for safe keeping, it must mean that I trust you very much, that I respect you highly. Right? I think this is what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. It's when a wife says in her heart, “Dear husband, I am going to let you hold me. It's a scary thing for me to do this, because I don't want to let go of the reins of my heart. But I'm going to let you be the leader in our family. I'm going to trust that you won't make any decision without thinking of me and talking to me and letting us agree together. I'm going to trust that you won't be selfish, and that you won't use your authority to hurt me in any way.” That is a huge calling, too, isn't it?

So, what if your spouse isn't like this? Wives, what if your husband isn't the most spiritual man in the world? What if he isn't the most caring? What if he doesn't treasure you unconditionally? Husbands, what if your wife isn't so loveable? What if she is disrespectful? What if she is belittling? What if she is like what Proverbs 27 says: **“Constantly dripping water on a rainy day and a nagging wife are alike. Trying to hold her back is like holding back the wind, like grasping oil with your right hand.”** What do you do in those situations?

Well, those might be some really difficult situations. Those might be some horrible relationships you are in. I would encourage you to talk to someone like your pastor about those situations. But for now, I want you to notice that God does not say, “Wives, respect your husbands *when they are respectable*.” God doesn't say that. God didn't say, “Husbands, love your wives *when they are loveable*.” He doesn't say that. He tells husbands to love their wives unconditionally. He tells wives to respect their husbands unconditionally.

Now, I don't know about you, and I cannot speak for my wife, but I am quite certain that I sin against my wife more often every day than any other person on the face of this earth. I could ask her that. I'm sure she would agree. She's the person I interact with the most, and so it's easy for my sinful flesh to get in between us.

If she hasn't given me enough attention, I get crabby and ornery. I shut down and get reclusive. I should join her with household chores more often, but it's easier to catch a nap or watch the game on the television. I jump on something she says instead of taking her words and actions in the kindest possible way. I love her dearly with my heart, but I

don't always show it with my mouth and hands. In my thoughts, I think about things that she could be doing better to make me happy, when instead my thoughts should dwell on what I could do to make her happy.

I think it is for this reason that Paul inserts this wonderful, good news of the gospel in this section for husbands and wives. **“Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.”** Aren't these the most wonderful words in the world to hear? Jesus is the bridegroom, and we are his bride. He loved us with a love that was willing to die for us. He died to make us holy and pure and clean. When we were baptized, he gave us his robes of righteousness to wear so that we are fit to be his bride! He willingly submitted to his Father, and he willingly loved us with his life. He has given us that perfect life as he clothes us with his righteousness in baptism. Even though we are flawed in every way, sinful in our thoughts and words and actions, yet we are at the same time a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or blemish.

I look at those words, and I think about my wedding day. I remember standing in the front of the church at St. John's Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. I remember so clearly my wife coming down the aisle with her arm in her dad's arm. People who attended our wedding said that I was just beaming. Such joy on my face. She was so beautiful. She was so gorgeous. She still is, of course. But that's what comes to mind with these words. I picture Christ just beaming over us. He has made us so perfect. So glorious. No wrinkles. No blemishes. Pure and holy, and he just beams over us.

And when I think about that, that's what makes Christian marriages great! Christ's love and his service to us makes us want to serve and love in our marriages. True? Jesus helps us live this beautiful design for husbands and wives. Even if our spouses aren't perfect (and they aren't), we have a perfect Savior who loves and serves us. That's why Paul writes, **“Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.”** Wives can unconditionally do that as if they are doing this for the Lord. That's why Paul writes, **“Husbands, love your wives in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”** Even if his wife isn't very loveable, the husband will still love her with word and action so that she feels loved. He will do this, not for his own sake, and not even for her sake. He does this because he is a man of God, a man redeemed by Christ, and a man who has experienced from Jesus the kind of love that his wife deserves and yearns for.

So, for those of you who are married, I will pray for you as you treasure God's design for the function of the family. May God bless our congregation with loving husbands and respecting wives who keep Jesus close to their hearts. Amen.