



MARK'S TEACHINGS

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MEN, WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

Genesis 1:27; 2:15-3:21; Ephesians 5:18-33

by Mark Maund

Introduction

Not long ago, I was reviewing my notes prior to a men's bible study I was asked to lead as a guest teacher. I had spent a considerable amount of time preparing to share the "Ten Things God Tells Us to Do When Trouble Comes", which was a study on **2 Chronicles 20**. When I reached Point #3, which was to discuss Jehoshaphat's calling all of the people of Judah to pray with him regarding the unprovoked attack from some neighboring nations, I had written in the margin of my notes a couple of examples of when we should call others to pray with us when they are also impacted by what is happening in our lives. One of those questions was, "Are you (husbands) hiding financial difficulties from your wives?" At that point, the Holy Spirit told me that I needed to change the lesson and teach on marriage, which I normally would readily do. However, I had already sent the materials I had planned to use and the handouts had already been printed, and it was 4:00 am and I was about to leave the house and drive 2 ½ hours to speak at 7:00 am! Of course, you know what I did or you wouldn't be reading this - I taught on marriage from the passages listed above. And, because I felt I needed to explain the reason for making a sudden change in the topic, I shared with the group what happened, including the 'question' that prompted the Holy Spirit's intervention.

Immediately following the study, a man came up to me and shared that his wife of 31 years asked him to move out of their house because he had borrowed a significant amount of money on their home (that was paid for) from their home equity line without telling her. His wife was devastated by the violation of trust and felt the same emotions as if he had committed adultery. He said, "When you shared that question about husbands hiding financial difficulties from their wives, I thought you were talking only to me." How's that for God being specific about what he wanted me to teach! But it didn't stop there...I met with four other men for another two hours that morning with similar stories. All of these men are believers, so how could this be?

My grandfather had several sayings and one that has stuck with me is this: "If it ain't broke, you ain't checked lately." I have taken my marriage and my relationship with Christie for granted, even as a disciple of Christ, so I shouldn't have been surprised by this revelation. In fact, God has shown me over the last several years that many Christians are ignorant, as was I, of how we are wired as men and women and of God's purpose and plan for marriage, but that they long to know. The tragedy is that many marriages end in divorce, or continue in unresolved conflict, both of which could be avoided with a little truth from God's Word and the power of His Holy Spirit working in us.

So what started out as an outline at the request of the teacher I filled in for that morning (I had no notes, remember, because I had no time to prepare), because he wanted to know what I said (what a day to choose not to record the session), has now turned into this narrative. And while I have personalized it as much as possible, a large majority of what I am about to share I learned from two pastors: Matt Williams, Grace Church in Greenville, SC, and Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City. The impact their teaching from God's

Word has had on our marriage and family, and others, is almost indescribable, but here is my attempt to share what we have gleaned so far.

Teaching

Let's begin with the story of Adam and Eve found in **Genesis 2 & 3**. There is much we can learn about how we are wired as men and women; what responsibilities and roles we have as husbands and wives; the consequences that result when unredeemed masculinity and femininity allow their sinful natures to rule; the nature of our enemy, Satan; and the grace and mercy of God, and his provision of redemption and protection.

Genesis 1:27 - God tells us that he created a man and a woman - not two men or two women - and that both were created in His image, which tells us that He must have given each of the sexes parts of Himself that the other does not have. In addition to anatomical differences, which are obvious, there are other differences we have experienced and will discover.

Genesis 2:15-17 - The bible tells us that God made Adam first, gave him responsibility for taking care of the garden God had created, and gave him only one rule: "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Pretty simple, right?

Genesis 2:18 - "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a *helper* suitable for him." The word "helper" does not translate well in English. The Hebrew word used here, 'ezer', literally means "one who provides strength in the area that is lacking" (ESV Study Bible). It is the same word used to describe God (**Psalms 33:20**) in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the Greek word for helper is 'parakletos', which is used to describe the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16**). It describes someone who advocates for another (as before a judge); who comes alongside and provides strength that is needed or lacking. So when God made woman as a suitable helper for man, she was not created to be his assistant...she was created to complete a man in ways only a woman can. God did not create another man to be Adam's complement, nor did he create two women - he created a man and a woman. Perhaps you have noticed that men and women see things differently sometimes? This is by design...God has uniquely gifted men with some of His character traits and women with others.

Genesis 2:23-25 - Adam describes Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh", which tells us that there is a closeness between a man and a woman united in marriage unlike any other relationship, because Moses then writes: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Adam and Eve did not have parents, so God inspired Moses to write this for our benefit. "One flesh" is as close as two people can get, and it goes way beyond the sexual union. There is an inseparable connection that takes place in marriage, and the first thing God tells us we need to do is leave our birth family and form a new family.

I do a considerable amount of marriage counseling in my wealth management practice as a result of marriage counselors referring clients that have financial problems they can't resolve. The two characteristics that are consistent in every couple I have seen are: 1) "His" money and "Her" money instead of "Our" money; and 2) each spouse describes how their parents handled money and presumes that theirs is the way it should be done. Therefore, the

first thing I have to do is explain that their marriage has created a brand new family and that they get to decide together how they want to do things in their family ('leave and cleave'). The problem, therefore, is that neither spouse has fully "left" their family of origin in order to "cleave" to the other. While each spouse can certainly gain knowledge and wisdom from their parents, forcefully inserting their parents' ways into the marriage without consulting the other on how he or she feels might be the best way often leads to disaster - not one flesh. Not "leaving" carries over into every part of the new marriage - from whether Dad's should change diapers and the Mother feel grateful for the help, or feel inadequate because she sees her husband's attempt to help as an indictment of her inability to change the diaper up to his standards (I am not making this up); to not going to church because one spouse's father always made them go to a church that they hated and that spouse resented it so much that they refuse to go instead of talking to their spouse about what they want in a church as a new family.

"One flesh" requires husbands and wives to put everything on the table for the new family that God is creating, and God, men, created our wives to be a source of strength and wisdom to complement the strengths and wisdom He gave us - not to compete, but to complete. And we see how it can be to be completely vulnerable with our wives in v. 25, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." They had nothing to hide, were completely vulnerable and it was good! But it didn't last long.

Genesis 3:1-6 - Satan's "craftiness" led him to ask the woman, "Did God really say?" However, Eve had not been created when God gave Adam the one rule - not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So at this point in the story, we are hoping Adam is out of town. Surely Eve would not attempt to speak with a snake about what God had said if Adam were present, would she? Not only that, she wouldn't misquote God, would she? Unfortunately, she did both. And Adam, he wouldn't stand there and let Eve speak with a talking snake about the one rule He had given to Adam about the responsibility he had for everything in Eden, and then eat from the one tree God forbade him from eating, would he? Unfortunately, he did both.

These actions by Adam and Eve reveal two unredeemed character traits in men and women: the autonomy (self-rule) of women and the passivity of men. We see this played out in our culture many times in raising children. There is a problem with one of the children at school and Mom steps in to take care of it because Dad doesn't even know anything about it. And, men, tell if I am wrong, we just want it handled, right? And if she is willing to do it, then we don't have to. But this behavior leads to an ever-increasing gap between a husband and a wife and it takes place subtly and over time. Initially, the woman feels empowered and that can feel good for a while, and the man sees her doing what he should be doing as the leader of the family, but he is just glad he doesn't have to get involved...she is better at 'that stuff' anyway. The problem, however, is that when a woman takes a step forward, a man will instinctively let her, and even take a step back. Again, this works for a while, but after the last child goes off to college the wife looks around and says, "What do I need you for?" And the husband says, "What did I do?" Therein lies the problem-unredeemed masculinity doesn't step up to the plate and unredeemed femininity does so independently. So much for 'one flesh.'

The result? Look at **Genesis 3:7-8**: Adam and Eve hid from each other (fig leaves) and from God (behind the tree). Sin causes us to hide from each other and from God, and therefore, an unredeemed man and an unredeemed woman cannot be one flesh. This is why Paul reminds us in **2 Corinthians 6:14** “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” And we see this played out in the story when God confronts Adam in the garden. When asked by God in **Genesis 3:11**, “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Adam says, ‘Yes, I’m sorry...please forgive me.’ No! He throws Eve (“bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh”) under the bus and tries to blame her and God: “The woman *you* put her with me - *she* gave me some fruit from the tree...” (**Genesis 3:12**). At least Eve admits she was deceived by the snake (**Genesis 3:13**) and doesn’t blame Adam for not fulfilling his God-given role in the garden.

But then God does the most amazing thing - He promises redemption before He punishes Adam and Eve for the first sin. Look at **Genesis 3:15**, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” God shows us His heart - a heart that yearns for our redemption and not our punishment. But there are consequences, as we know, in this life when we disobey God, and God metes out the punishment in an interesting way - talionic justice. He tells the snake (Satan), because you tried to put yourself above me, I am going to make you crawl on your belly...because you tried to raise yourself up I am going to bring you down low (**Genesis 3:14-15**). Eve was then told she would have pain in childbirth (she ushered sin into the world and would be reminded, as would all women, of that every time a child is born) and that she would have a desire for her husband, but that “he will rule over you” (**Genesis 3:16**). In other words, wives desire to be led and cared for by their husbands, but instead are abused in many different ways. Unredeemed masculinity does not treat unredeemed femininity very well. Finally, Adam is told that he will not be allowed to be passive any more if he wants to eat and survive - he is going to have to work hard for his food, and then he will die - the ultimate penalty for sin (**Genesis 3:17-19**).

Adam and Eve are then “banished” from the garden, but not before God provided the first sacrifice in **Genesis 3:21**, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” A blood sacrifice was made to provide a covering for the sins of Adam and Eve - wow!

So this is what unredeemed masculinity and femininity look like and how God deals with us when we exercise our sinful natures. So why on earth would anyone ever get married!? I am glad you asked.

Turn with me to **Ephesians 5:18-33**. This passage provides the most amazing insight into God’s design for marriage, its purpose and how we are to live it out.

Let’s look first at v. 18: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Two ‘believers’, as Paul wrote, should be yoked to one another, but we cannot do this on our own - even with good intentions. God clearly tells us that we must be filled with His Holy Spirit in order to be the husband and wife He desires us to be...for us to enjoy fully the blessings of marriage and fulfill its purpose. In fact, Scripture says we are to be filled with the Spirit so that when we speak to each other it is with “psalms, hymns and

spiritual songs” (v. 19) - not with harsh, unredeemed language, which the flesh so quickly and easily can spew out. Men, think of a time when a harsh word to your wife paid dividends. Can I get a witness?!

The next thing we learn in v. 20 is that we are to always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. How many of us thank God for everything - the good and the bad? How many of us thank God that we have the wife we have to go through the good and the bad? How many of us think that a lot of the “bad” in our life emanates from our wives? Men, remember, we were created first and have the responsibility of leading our wives, and our children...we set the example. So, when was the last time you thanked God for the conflict in your marriage and addressed it with your wife with “psalms and spiritual songs?”

Several years ago, God got my attention in this matter. My wife hates going to the grocery store and I used to complain that we never had anything to eat in the house that I liked. She also likes to have a cup of coffee first thing in the morning but she hates having to make it. My problem was I hated that she hated doing these things, and I began to let the less than 1% of my wife’s behavior affect my feelings for her - I let my flesh take charge.

You see, when I was growing up, my mother went to the grocery store (I never remember my father going with her), and to this day, she keeps at least ten different types of crackers in their pantry! My father doesn’t drink coffee and my mother always got up first and made the coffee and fixed my father’s breakfast. So you know what I thought, right? If Christie would just ask me what I wanted from the grocery store (or just buy ‘ten’ of everything!) and prepare the coffee she wanted, using the timer I showed her how to use on the coffee pot so it would be ready at exactly the time she wanted the next morning, everything would be fine. How do you think that worked out for me?

Then God said to me, “Hey, dip wad - why don’t you go to the grocery store and make the coffee for Christie?!” (He didn’t say it quite like that, but you get the point). And I remember thinking, “but that’s the wife’s job - why would I do that?” God said, “Try it, you’ll like it... dip wad!” (God didn’t call me a ‘dip wad’, but that’s how I felt). So I started making the coffee and offered to do the grocery shopping. Christie told me she didn’t mind the shopping part - she just wanted me to go with her to pick out anything extra that I might want.

Four things I have learned from obeying God in this matter:

- 1) Making coffee the night before and setting the timer takes 90 seconds, i.e. it’s not a big deal.
- 2) Going to the grocery store is fun! We run into many friends and Sunday evenings have turned into a 2-hour social affair that I look forward to.
- 3) I feel good when I obey God and do things He advises me to do to help my wife.
- 4) My wife *really* enjoys being one flesh when I do these things. As James Brown used to say, “Let me break it down for ya!” If I had known that making coffee (taking her a cup in the morning gets extra points, by the way) and going to the grocery store were

such incredible foreplay, I would have brought snacks and made coffee on our honeymoon!

By the way, I shared this with my Dad and he was very grateful! In all seriousness, though, before I received any response from my wife as a result of my change in attitude and action, I felt good. I found that I really enjoy obeying God and helping my wife. “Our” intimacy - my closeness with God and my wife - grew out of *my* decision to honor God and Christie. God made us, male and female, He made us, and He tells us exactly what we need to do to please Him and enjoy each other in the most amazing ways.

So, we are to be filled with the Spirit (v.18), speak to one another with joy (v.19), thank God for everything that we experience as husband and wife (v.20), and then “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v.21). What does it mean to “submit?” The Greek word is “hupotasso” and it means, “to arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection; to subject one’s self, obey; to submit one’s control; to yield to one’s admonition or advice; to obey, be subject.” (www.lexiconconcordance.com/greek/5293). Think about that...what would our marriages be like if we submitted our opinions, ideas, prejudices, thoughts, and ways to our spouses? In other words, what if we abandoned selfishness and pursued unity (not uniformity)? If, in fact, God made us as complements to each other, and, husbands, our wives were created by God to help us, why wouldn’t we “submit to one another?”

Husbands, our wives were designed to help us solve problems. They have a way of looking at things that we don’t have. For example, when Christie and I were doing our estate planning, which I do for a living, she told me she trusted me, that I was the expert, and therefore I could take care of that because she isn’t good with numbers and can’t even “do percentages.” However, I told her that I knew that she possessed a wisdom about our children that I did not have...that she had a wonderful perspective on all matters relative to our family, and that I needed and valued her opinions. “Oh”, she said, “then I’ll go.” Operating independent of one another in a marriage, however, can lead to disaster.

A couple very close to us has had some very difficult times recently due to some significant overspending on their house, coupled with the husband losing his job. He felt like his wife was the one that wanted the much bigger house and she thought he did. So while trying to please each other, they ended up building a wall between them. He resented her for overspending and not understanding the tremendous financial burden he was under, and she blamed him for always wanting the best of everything! It led to her asking him for a divorce. He sat at my kitchen table one Saturday morning and shared this with me and said he didn’t know what to do. We talked for a while and he told me the burden he was carrying and all of the details. It was the first time in our 35 years of being friends that he had been this transparent with me. So, we prayed, and then I told him to tell his wife exactly what he had just told me - what he was thinking, what he thought she was thinking and how the financial burden was killing him and he didn’t know what to do. Well, he did, and guess what? After 31 years of marriage they connected - they became one flesh by sharing the burden! Remember, “giving thanks to God the Father for *everything*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?” They came and spent the weekend with us a couple of months later and his wife couldn’t stop thanking me and hugging me!

You see, submitting to one another does not mean that we don't communicate...that we don't find out what our spouse is thinking. That type of submissiveness leads to disaster. It means we share our thoughts, ideas, concerns, fears, etc. with each other out of our love for God and one another; that because we are in Christ, we can be completely vulnerable (no "fig leaves") and come to a "one flesh" decision that benefits this new family that God has brought together. And that never changes...we never reach a point where we can take each other for granted. Submitting to one another is a lifelong pursuit that enables us to grow even closer to one another. Have you experienced this in your relationship with Jesus Christ? As you confess all things to Him - sins, fears, inadequacies, doubts - are you not drawn closer? Have you not fallen more and more in love with Him as you submit to Him?

Remember, we have a Savior that understands and has the power and authority to get involved. Let's look at **Hebrews 4:14-16**: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith that we profess. For we do not have a high priest that is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." As husbands and wives, do we "sympathize with each other's weaknesses" and "receive mercy and find grace" from each other "to help us in our time of need", or do we look for ways to use those weaknesses against each other - to tear each other down? Have you ever considered your spouse's weaknesses to be a means of grace - that by ministering to them the way Jesus ministers to us in our weaknesses, we are actually drawn *closer* to one another - not driven apart? Do you think God was telling the truth in **Romans 8:28**: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose?"

Let me pose another question: would you prefer God to love you covenantally (as He does), or contractually? Do you understand the difference between a contract and a covenant? A contract is an agreement between two or more parties that demands certain duties and responsibilities be performed by each party, and when any party breaches the contract, i.e. does not perform any one of the duties or responsibilities called for in the contract, it also provides details on how the contract can be terminated. A covenant calls for each party to do their part regardless of the performance, or lack thereof, of the other party. So let me ask again: are you glad that God loves us covenantally and not contractually? As husband and wife, do you realize that you each entered into a covenant of marriage and not a contract? Do you remember the vows you took, "to love one another in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, until death do you part?" What part of those vows sound like a contract? We are called to love each other unconditionally - just like God loves us. Let me be the first to say, "I can't do that!" But wait, I took the same vows of marriage to Christie - what do I do now?

The first eight years of our marriage I tried to love Christie covenantally in my own strength. But the more I tried that on my own, the more contractually minded I became - the more conditional love I began to show. It wasn't until I made Jesus Christ my *Lord* and Savior - not just my Savior - that things began to change, but not how you may think. You see, the first five years or so I tried to do God's job...I was going to convince everyone - my family, friends, and co-workers - that they needed Jesus. And if they didn't get it, I was going to do whatever

it took to convince them that I had it all figured out, and if they didn't accept Him, I was going to "shake the dust off of my sandals" and move on. Actually, the opposite was taking place - I stayed and everyone around me grew more miserable and wanted to leave!

One night, Christie and I were having a "discussion" and she shared with me that I "wasn't any fun anymore." And then she added, "I'm not finished...if YOU are what being a Christian is all about, I am not interested...good night!" She went to bed and I stood in the dressing area of our bathroom in shock. I paced around the room talking to myself about how ridiculous Christie's opinions of my behavior were, and then I went to bed. I tossed and turned for some time, and then I rolled over (thinking she was asleep) and whispered, "Am I really not any fun anymore?" and she rolled over and said, "NO!" I laid there in the bed and asked God, "Why is this happening...am I not doing exactly what I read in the bible I was supposed to do?" And God said, "Quit doing my job. I want you to love Christie, your family, your co-workers, and everyone else the way I love you - unconditionally." I remember feeling like a huge burden had been lifted off of me...I felt a sense of relief and experienced peace in a way that I never had before!

God has such perfect timing. This "event" took place right about the time I got rid of the last Playboy magazine I had been hiding in my music room. Yes, I was addicted to pornography, even though five years before when I asked Jesus to be Lord of my life, and my only request (at the time) was a better relationship with my wife and daughters, He waited until this moment to answer my prayer. You see, He told me when I made that request five years before that I needed to get rid of the magazines if I wanted to enjoy a better relationship with Christie AND our daughters - that if I wanted to be a better husband AND father, the Playboy's had to go. And then He used Christie, who, thank God, continued to love me covenantally, to deliver the convicting blow. Was I ashamed? Yes! Did I experience grace and mercy from God and Christie in my time of need? Yes! And then my prayer was answered and my relationships with Christie, Katherine, Mary Baker, and Houston (another blessing that God provided during this period) began to be transformed (more on the roles of husbands and fathers later). It was the transformation of me through the power of the Holy Spirit that made God attractive to them. I learned to "walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (**Galatians 5:16**), and that it is the Holy Spirit's job - not mine - to "convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (**John 16:8**)

Now, don't think that I now thought I was to be passive; that the Holy Spirit was going to do everything that needed to be done. How does the Holy Spirit work? Through believers in Christ. Furthermore, where in the bible does it say that conviction has to take place in a negative tone or way? Are you familiar with the old saying, "kill 'em with kindness?" Biblically speaking, God put it this way: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (**Romans 2:4**). The word used for "repentance" here is "metanoia," which means "a change of mind." And that change of mind came about for me through the kindness, tolerance and patience of God through Christie. So as I began to learn more about the Holy Spirit and how He operates, I was not surprised when I read **Galatians 5:22-26**: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the

Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” Of course, this passage reminded me of the passage that was read at our wedding, and probably most of yours, from **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Well, I’ll be (a Southern phrase describing a ‘dip wad’ finally starting to understand what God has been showing and telling him).

So, let’s review the four things God tells us we are to do as believers in Christ BEFORE we try to fulfill our roles as husband and wife:

- 1) Be filled with the Spirit - **Ephesians 5:18**
- 2) Speak to each other (all people - not just your spouse) with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (beautiful words), and make music in your heart to the Lord (always be joyful) - **Ephesians 5:19**
- 3) Thank God for everything - the good and the bad - **Ephesians 5:20**, because He is working in all things for the good of those who love Him - **Romans 8:28**
- 4) Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ - **Ephesians 5:21**

Now we move into our roles in marriage, and **Ephesians 5:22**, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord”, has been misconceived, distorted and taken out of context. Remember, **v. 21** says we are “to submit to one another.” So why then does the next verse tell wives to submit to their husbands? Tim and Kathy Keller, in their book, “The Meaning of Marriage”, which I highly recommend, describe our roles in submitting like this:

“Some men, unaware or unwilling to assume their servant-leader roles, believe that simply being male brings entitlement with it. And women, often the victims of such mistaken understanding, want no part of any teaching that would demote them to inferior status. But in a marriage, where there are only two “votes,” how can a stalemate be broken without someone having to give way? In the vast majority of cases, the stalemate is broken because each will try to give the other his or her pleasure. The wife will try to respect the husband’s leadership, and the husband will in turn try to please his wife. If this dynamic is in place, in the course of a healthy Biblical marriage, “overruling” will be rare. But what of a case where both parties cannot agree, but some kind of decision must be made? Someone must have the right to cast the deciding vote and (thus) take the greater responsibility for the decision.

This should be the place where the one the Bible calls “head” takes the accountability. When it happens, both people “submit” to their role. Often, an intelligent husband doesn’t want this role, and the intelligent wife does! The situation could be chaotic, but here we are called to act out the drama of redemption, where the Son voluntarily gives the headship to the Father, saying, ‘Not my will, but thine be done.’”

Remember, in the story of Adam and Eve, that even though Eve was deceived and ate the forbidden fruit first, God came looking for Adam in the garden afterward...**Genesis 3:9**: “But the Lord God called to *the man*, ‘Where are you?’” You see, Adam was given the role of

making sure everything was managed well in the garden and Eve was given to him by God to help him. In our roles, husbands should seek their wives input, wisdom, knowledge, and experience in helping make the best decision for the family - “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (**Ephesians 5:21**) - but the husband bears the responsibility for all of the decisions.

So wives, here’s the deal. You and your husband work together - not your way or his way - to decide to do whatever you as a couple think is best in a situation. After sharing thoughts and opinions with each other, your husband agrees that your input has merit and decides to follow your advice and it turns out wrong - he’s still responsible (just like Adam). Likewise, wives, if your husband makes a decision for the family that goes against your best recommendation, he is also responsible. However, that does not mean that either spouse is then justified in “beating up” the “guilty” party, which causes us to put on the “fig leaves” again...that’s not loving each other unconditionally. It means that, as “one flesh”, the two assess what happened and work together to pick up the pieces and grow closer to one another through the process. We learn from our mistakes - we don’t hold them against each other. And since neither one really knows what is best anyway, prayer should be the means for making all decisions. **Romans 8:26-27** says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” If we, as individual believers in Christ, are told to “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ” (**2 Corinthians 10:5b**), why would we ever think it would be different when we get married? We don’t even know what we ought to pray for!

Remember when Adam stood there while his wife had a conversation with a snake about what God had said? Was it important that there was nothing in the instruction book about a talking snake? No! What was important was that Adam and Eve recognized they had a situation - sort of like astronauts. You remember, the astronauts would go to space and they would see and experience things they had never seen or experienced, and then a problem would come up and they would do what? They would get on the radio and say, “Houston, we have a problem.” What do you think would have happened if Adam and Eve had said to the snake, “Excuse us for a minute, we’ll be right back”, and they went and prayed that they did not know what to do in their situation with a talking snake who was questioning what God really said? Do you think God would have honored that prayer? Wives, what if Eve had submitted to her husband in that situation (instead of exercising her bent towards self-rule) and told the snake that she wasn’t there when God gave her husband the one rule about the tree in the middle of the garden, and that if the snake wanted to know what God said, he should ask her husband? Do you think the situation may have turned out differently? Wives, looking back, do you think Eve wishes she had submitted to Adam in that situation?

Husbands, what do you think? If Eve had submitted to Adam, would Adam have handled the situation differently? Would he have stepped up to the plate? Guess what, men? Either way, God still holds us responsible. Let’s now look at the husband’s role in marriage.

Ephesians 5:25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other

blemish, but holy and blameless.” Husbands, have you ever asked yourselves if you are loving your wife the way Christ loves the church? Have you ever considered what Christ gave up, and for whom?

Let’s look at **Philippians 2:5-8**: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!” Can you imagine? Jesus was on the throne in Heaven and made the choice to give up everything - his omniscience, his omnipotence, his omnipresence, his royalty - to be born as a man, severely mistreated and murdered, which he knew in advance would happen, because He loved us so much? That Christ would die for the “ungodly?” (**Romans 5:6**)

I met with a young couple for financial counseling several years ago (second marriage for her; late first marriage for him - you psychologists can analyze all the problems unredeemed masculinity and femininity might create in this situation) because they had a lack of communication around money in their marriage and their budget was very tight. I had them share how they had each grown up around money, and I recorded all of their income and expenses so that both could look at them together (for the first time!). You see, the wife was driving a 12-year-old car that was costing them about \$300/month to maintain, and it was creating stress on her because it had broken down several times while going to work and trying to pick up the kids from school. Her only request was for her husband to consider their buying another used car for her, which she had researched and selected, that would get better gas mileage and only cost \$280/month to finance (by the way, he was driving a 2-year-old Chevy Z-71 pick-up that he bought new and was paying \$485/month for out of “his” money). You would think that just his seeing that fact on paper would have thrown a good-sized wrench at his conscience, but it didn’t. In addition, he was spending \$7,500 annually to take a fishing trip in the summer and a hunting trip in the fall to Canada. His justification was that he worked hard and he needed that time to get away twice a year.

Now, is there anything inherently wrong with Z-71’s and hunting/fishing in Canada? No. But when “bone of your bones and flesh of your flesh” has a vehicle like this and you ignore the need, how do you think the “one flesh” thing is going to work? Not too good! More importantly, is this how Christ loves the church, men? Was He looking out for his own interests when He died on the cross for us? So, I asked him if he would consider taking one trip to Canada instead of two and use \$3,750 of “his money” toward the purchase of a reliable vehicle for his wife. He said, “Yeah, I guess so.” To which I responded, “Do you love your wife?!”

New Year’s Eve has always been special for my wife because we “fell in love” on New Year’s Eve in 1982 (she was a little late to the party...I told her on our second date that I was going to marry her). That being said, I have played in bands for almost 40 years and I love playing guitar. So my band had been asked to play the biggest party in town for New Year’s Eve 1988 and I asked Christie if it was ok for me to book it (the truth is, I probably coerced her into letting me do it because it was what I wanted). Not long after that, Christie and I began discussing having another baby and she got pregnant shortly thereafter (you know where this is going). As luck would have it (actually, as God would have it), Mary Baker was due on

January 8 but she came early - on December 27. Christie had to have a C-section and was, therefore, still in the hospital on December 31. Yes, I left my wife alone in the hospital on New Year's Eve - the anniversary of when she fell in love with me - to go do what I wanted to do. How do you think that worked out for me? Needless to say, I have not played a New Year's Eve gig since 1988, and I don't miss it!

So, husbands, let me ask you: What are *you* selfishly holding onto that is preventing you from enjoying "one flesh" with your spouse? Cars (think "GTO" or "Chevelle" - money to buy and time to work on them)? Guitars (think "Strat", Tele" or "Les Paul" - money to buy and time to play)? Golf (think Callaway and Titliest - time and money away from your wife every Saturday)? Tennis (think two nights a week and every Saturday & Sunday to "stay in shape")? Work (think how many times work has come before your wife and ask yourself what you're going to do when you finally achieve success, only to discover your wife is leaving you because she has been in second place too long)? Hunting or fishing (you already have a story on this one)?

How about other issues? For example, are you hiding financial difficulties from your wife, like an investment that has gone bad that she knew nothing about in the first place? I know, your intent was to help enhance the retirement portfolio for the two of you, but you didn't talk to your wife about the investment and ask her what she thought about it and now you can't tell her that it has gone bad. How's that affecting your "oneness?"

What about pornography, alcohol, drugs, and gambling? These last four (this is not an exhaustive list) can easily become addictions, and they destroy "oneness" in ways that I hope I do not need to describe to you. Unlike hobbies, addictions take total control of a person and make it almost impossible to have a rational conversation about a change in behavior without professional help. Needless to say, therefore, because addictions are obsessions, men, they take first place all of the time -not just some of the time - over our wives...they literally destroy "oneness." If you are suffering with an addiction, and you are "in Christ," I urge you to pray right now that God will give you his strength to do two of the most difficult things you have ever had to do: admit to your wife that you have an addiction and seek help. I pray you will be surprised and elated by the wonderful "helper" God has given you as a wife.

If you have never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, I pray that you will do so now. God loves you (**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life") and He wants to have an eternal relationship with you (**John 14:3** "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"). If you don't think you are worthy, welcome to the club! None of us is worthy (**Romans 3:23** "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God")! That's why Jesus came, suffered and died for us (**Romans 5:6-8** "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us") - not after we made an "A" in life, but while we were making an "F" and at our worst. What kind of God would do that!? A loving God, and all you have to do to have a relationship with God is to receive the pardon He has already granted to you in his Son, Jesus Christ, by following **Romans 10:9-10**: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you

will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

Look at v. 27 again...husbands, we are to present our wives to God “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless,” which is just how Christ is to present the church to “himself as a radiant church.” Men, have you ever thought about that - that we are responsible for leading our wives into the hands of God this way? I don’t know about you, but I was never able to love my wife this way until I loved her through Christ. And please make no mistake...I still fail miserably many times. But just like our *fellowship* with God is broken by sin, our *relationship* never ends because of the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ through the covenant (not the contract) He made with us. So when I fail, I can repent and seek Christ’s forgiveness rather than try to hide from her (put on my “fig leaves”).

Just stop and think for a moment...how much bad behavior has Jesus Christ tolerated in the church? How many times has He had to forgive us? How many more times in the future do you think we will need His forgiveness? More importantly, what is His attitude toward us when we seek His forgiveness? **Hebrews 4:14-16** says, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Husbands, do our wives approach us with fear and receive judgment from us? Is that how we want to be received and treated by Christ? Don’t we thank God that we have a Savior that we can approach with confidence when we are struggling, and “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need?” Is this not, then, how we should receive our wives when they approach us with their struggles with sin? Look at **1 John 1:9**: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Husbands, are we “faithful and just” in forgiving our wives’ sins so that Jesus Christ can work through us to redeem our wives and “cleanse them from all unrighteousness,” so that we can present them to God “without stain or wrinkle or blemish, but holy and blameless?”

How? By “cleansing her by the washing with water through the word” (v. 26). How did you feel when you read the verses above about forgiveness? As husbands we are to use God’s word to minister to our wives, whom God tells us “to make holy.” The word “holy” in the original text is the word “hagios”, which literally means “set apart.” Husbands, have you set your wives apart from every other person? Our wives are unique to everyone else in our lives, and God has called us to treat them as such. We are not called to present anyone else - not even our children - “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Husbands, how much time and energy are you devoting to building your relationship with your wife in Christ?

“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of his body” (v. 28-30). Do you remember falling off your bike or stumbling on the sidewalk and skinning your knee when you were a little boy? And if your dad was outside when it happened, did you want him to tell you how to avoid doing that in the future, or did you just want him to hold you until your knee

quit hurting? When our wives are hurting, do we really think they are looking for instruction any more than we would be if the situation was reversed? Don't we just want to be with someone who understands how it feels to be hurting...someone "who sympathizes with our weaknesses?"

And later that evening (back to the "skinned knee" example) when it was time to come inside from playing, do you remember what it was like to have to take a bath with a freshly skinned knee? I remember practicing circus quality contortionist moves to avoid getting my knee in the warm water because I knew it was going to sting really badly. Do you remember gently easing it, little by little, into the water and grimacing as each part of the wound entered the water? And what about when it was time to wash your knee with a washcloth and soap? Every kid was a wound care specialist...adept at gently cleansing the wound with the least amount of pain and with the utmost care!

Husbands, this is the same way we are to treat our wives' wounds, and when they hurt, we hurt. And some have deeper wounds than others. Your wife may have suffered emotional, physical, or even sexual abuse by her father. Or maybe her father passed away when she was a teenager and the pain she may be experiencing because he hasn't been there to see the major events in her life unfold can be a cause of great sadness. Maybe her mother never thought she was good enough and she is still trying to prove that she is - to you and everyone else! Some wounds do not heal quickly or easily, and our patience can run very thin. We may risk telling our wives "to get over it" because we grow weary trying to care for the "open wound." But remember, we are to be "filled with the Spirit" (v. 18) and not try to love our wives with our own strength, which, for me, runs out pretty quickly.

Remember how the bible defines love (and this passage was probably read at your wedding): "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a). Have you ever considered, men, that God wants to use our wives' difficulties to bring us closer to Him? That these difficulties, while taxing, can actually be used by God to build a more intimate relationship with our wives because He calls us to suffer with our wives as if the wound was our own?

Paul provides a vivid personal example of this kind of struggle and how God taught him to gain a new perspective. Look at 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

I heard a pastor, Wayne Barber, sum it up this way: "God, I can't, and you never said I could; God, you can, and you always said you would." Think about how much God is using our wives, men, to "help" us grow closer to Him (Genesis 2:18, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'."), and to each other. You see,

the next verse, **Ephesians 5:31**, quotes **Genesis 2:24**: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” We are to be united with our wives the same way Christ is united with the church. He shares in our difficulties and knows firsthand what it is like to be tempted and suffer, which is the same way we are to share in our wives’ difficulties and suffering. Remember, God created both of us, and with a divine purpose. And his goal has always been “oneness.”

John 17 records Jesus’ prayer right before he is arrested, and **v. 20-23** speak of our oneness with God, Christ and each other: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Wow...did you ever think that God would use the marriage relationship as a model of oneness for men and women to experience God’s love for us? That his grace and mercy could be modeled through a sinful, broken, loving, and faithful couple in marriage as a living testimony of how Christ loves the church?

Look at **v. 32**, “This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church.” There it is! The purpose of marriage is for a man and woman to love each other in in a covenantal relationship just like Christ loves the church. What a privilege! What a responsibility! Now we know why Paul began this portion of **Ephesians (v.18)** with “be filled with the Spirit.” We are to be in the mutual redemption business...caring for each other and loving each other the way Christ loves us - with unconditional love (grace) and mercy. But we are also to let the Spirit convict our spouse through us for the purpose of correction, confession, repentance, and forgiveness, so that oneness with our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ can be fleshed out in our marriage as we allow the Spirit of God to work in us for oneness with our spouse. What a marvelous way God has chosen to reveal his incredible love for us!

Yet many of us have experienced the same rejection from our spouses that Christ himself experienced from the very people He came to redeem. Many times this rejection is a direct result of one spouse repeatedly breaking the trust of the other, or repeatedly not meeting the needs of the other. But God reminds us in the closing verse of **Ephesians 5:33** of our key roles as husbands and wives: “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” Husbands, isn’t this the way Jesus loves us? **John 13:34-35** says: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” As husbands, how can we ever expect anyone to believe we will love them the way Christ loves us if we don’t love our wives that way...as we love ourselves? God has given us our wives, men, to show us how to love one another the way Christ loves the church...to experience all of the flaws of sin in another person and to experience the joy of redemption - just like Jesus. And when we love our wives this way, our children learn how to love, and our neighbors, friends and co-workers want to know “how we do it.” Isn’t that what Jesus calls us to do? If we choose to marry, God calls us into a covenantal relationship designed to teach us how to love and forgive on a daily basis - to experience the same pain and the same joy

that our Lord does - for the purpose of making real the redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ - to be "Jesus with skin" to another. Can you imagine a more important and invaluable task than that?

Finally, wives, the bible says you should "respect" your husband. The word used here in the Greek is "phobeo", which is most often translated "to fear, to be afraid." It's where we get our word "phobia." However, it also means "to treat with reverence or deferential obedience" (Thayer's Greek Dictionary). It is the same word used in **Colossians 3:22**, "*fearing* the Lord"; in **1 Peter 2:17**, "*fear* God"; and in **Ephesians 5:21**, "Submit to one another out of *reverence* for Christ." Think of how we revere God above all others...to worship him and him only. The same God that said, "You shall have no other gods before me" (**Exodus 20:3**) tells wives to revere their husbands above all other humans - just like the marriage relationship is to be prioritized above every other relationship. As difficult as this may be for some of you because of past history with your husbands, God is calling you to fulfill your role in this redemption story on a continuous basis...literally, "keep on respecting."

Remember God's promise in **Romans 8:28**: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." The scripture does not say all things are good...it says they work together for good. So when we as husbands decide to obey God and love our wives the way Christ loves the church, and wives decide to obey God by always respecting their husbands, what do you think God will do? Will he fulfill his promise in **Deuteronomy 5:10**: "showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments?" Husbands and wives, are you willing to trust God in fulfilling your roles - living faithfully, by "being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see" (**Hebrews 11:1**)?