

Family Series 2023 #3 – What is a Husband?

Biblical Headship and Related Blessings – Eph 5:22-33

Introduction - Our greatest strength in withstanding the growing government tyranny that is upon us is the nuclear family, and this is why we are taking the time to again address the ministry of the family with a short series on children and parents, husbands and wives. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson famously refused to answer the question at her nomination hearing “could you provide a definition for the word woman?”, feigning ignorance and claiming she was not a biologist. That gained Republicans all kinds of political fodder and mockery. More importantly it revealed how impotent the church is, with its millions of evangelicals in our land, many of whom themselves would be hard pressed or embarrassed to define what it is to be a man or a woman. And many would have no idea how to define “husband” or “wife.” When God grants a true awakening in our land and a reformation in our churches, one of the cultural areas that will be most notably affected will be the recovery of the biblical roles of husband and wife.

What is a Husband? (vv31-32) – A husband is a man who, having left his mother and father, makes covenant vows of faithfulness to one woman to enter into a sexual union protected by those vows made before God and society. Those vows are specified by the scriptures and not by our own whims.

Paul teaches this by quoting Genesis 2:24 which defines and describes the first marriage in the context of obeying God’s command to “*be fruitful and multiply*” so that they might fill and subdue the earth as God’s vice-regents to His glory. In other words, getting married is not simply an option for men and women. It is an act of obedience to the Lord. This is good to think about because when obedience is a joy we often forget that it is obedience. Of course, getting married is not an automatic act of obedience (one could marry for sinful reasons or in a sinful way), nor is it automatically disobedience to not be married (there are faithful reasons to not marry at a particular moment in one’s life). But generally speaking, men are to pursue a wife because it is not good for man to be alone – and women are to be given in marriage, because woman was made for man (1 Cor 11:9).

A husband is a man who enters into a covenant to become “*one flesh*” with one woman. This is not limited to the sexual union of a husband and wife, but it does include that and even begins there. Marriage is a mutual indwelling of the husband and wife, reflecting the mutual indwelling of Christ and the church, as well as the life of the Persons of the Trinity.

The Headship of a Husband (v23) – Because God alone defines marriage, every time there is a marriage; the husband becomes the head of his wife. This is not a suggestion, option, or command; this is a statement of fact. And the “*as also*” part tells us that husbands are speaking about Christ and about His gospel all day long, every day. The question is never whether or not he is the head. The question is always whether or not he is being an obedient head or a disobedient head. And this verse also teaches us that we learn about headship in marriage by looking to the ultimate and final marriage – the headship of Christ to His bride.

The Fullness of Headship – “*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*” (Eph 1:22-23). This earlier passage in Ephesians speaks of Christ’s headship over His body and Paul picks up on this language in 5:23. Because we live in a world made by the triune God, fullness in one place does not mean emptiness in another place. More “*here*” does not mean less “*there*.” In these verses we see that the Father gives the Son all things, filling Him. The Son is filled by having been given all, and the Son is the One who fills all. Biblical headship bestows fullness to its body and the full body fills the head. This is the mutual indwelling of head and body, of the husband and wife, of Christ and His bride, and of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Sacrificial Love that is Headship – Right after telling us that Christ is the head of the church, we are told what this headship entails... “*and He is the Savior of the body.*” Christ did not save the body by issuing decrees from His autonomous throne in heaven. He took on human flesh, dwelt with men, and humbled Himself for us, even to the point of death on a cross (Phil 2:5-9). And this is the first point of application for the husband who is the head: “*...love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (v25). The head loves the body, because, by definition, the head loves his own body (vv28-29).

The Vows of Headship – In the same way that Christ loved the church, so husbands are to imitate that love for their wives. This kind of love calls him to be covenantally responsible for her (and her children) before God. As the Lord gives in His providence, these vows and the sexual union are to bring forth children. His vows to her are tribal in that they immediately include the generations that will follow because of this union. If people are faithful to God, then God gives mercy to them – to a thousand generations (Exod 20:5-6).

Monogamous Love - Like Christ, the husband is focused on one wife, one bride and for the long-haul. (Prov 5:15-19). Lust and adultery are, of course, excluded. But so is the sin of comparison, for this only reveals that his discontent mind is on other women. Finally, it is certain the love of a husband to his wife should be above his love to all other human relations. She is his bride, she is his sister, she is his companion. No one else should come close. His monogamous love must be emotional, relational, and sexual, focused upon her needs and desires.

Efficacious Love (5:27) - Consider this “optimistic love” which sees past all imperfections and creates a more lovely wife because of this love. Christ has this attitude and effect upon His bride. Imitating Christ means cultivating this optimistic love and hope in your marriage.

Selfish Love (5:28-29) - Paul says you cannot love your wife like this without it returning in blessing on you. If you have your head on straight, you will only try to love her more. But you will also learn that you can never out-love your wife which will protect the marriage from score-keeping on who has sacrificed more.

Nourishing Love - A love that nourishes and cherishes (as if she were his own body) is always attentive to her needs. Husbands are responsible to provide spiritual food and relational warmth to their wives. And so this love also leads, providing direction, devotion to the Lord, family devotions and church worship are his responsibility for his family.

Prayerful Love - If you imitate Christ, then your love will be bathed in prayer for her (John 17:9) and constant intercession for her (Heb 7:25). And because you want those prayers heard, you will treat her in a particular way (1 Pet 3:7) - even and especially if she is the kind of wife that needs a husband to pray for her.

Constant Love (v30) - Just as his head is always listening to and responding to the needs of his body, so he as head is always listening to and responding to the needs of his wife. This is constant, organic, ongoing, love - like the love of Christ for His body.

The Covenantal Power of Headship - Being in covenant with your wife (just as Christ is in covenant with us) means that everything the head does is amplified. That is, the husband's obedience brings great blessing to all those in covenant with him. Your particular, incarnational, prayerful love for your wife will be efficacious (Eph 5:26-27). On the other hand, disobedience will bring curses upon those under your headship (Rom 5:14). Once again, how you act speaks about Christ all day long. What do you believe about Jesus Christ? What has He promised you?

Turning Your Marriage Around/Turning this World Around - The path is the same for both. Families are the building block of society, the nuclear family proclaims the Gospel of our Lord Jesus in living color, and we have generations in front of us to rebuild this spiritual war-zone. The gospel needs to be thundered from the pulpits and lived out in Christian homes. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.