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*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

If a guy catches the winning touchdown in the Superbowl, he deserves to be in the introduction of my sermon the following Sunday, wouldn't you agree? Well not normally but in this case, I need to make an exception. I am not a huge football fan and I have not followed the Eagles. The last time I remember watching the eagles play was when the packers beat them in 2011 on their way to win the Super Bowl. So Sunday night was the first time I had ever heard the name Zach Ertz. He did make an amazing last minute touchdown to help the eagles win their first Super Bowl. But it's what he said before the game that really caught my attention. And you'll see why I am starting with this brief video clip.

Here are two things that Zach said that really stood out to me  
"Our number one goal on this earth is to make disciples."

“Being the head of the household, the foundation of our marriage is built on the Word. Anytime you’re able to build something with that strong foundation, you’re not going to be easily swayed.”



This is great stuff! The making disciples comment is of course what we are all about as a church. And his comment about marriage fits perfectly with our study in Ephesians five, which I believe is the premier passage in all of the Bible on the topic of marriage.

Now the crazy thing about his wife is that she is also a sports superstar. She plays for the US women’s soccer team. Julie Ertz won a World Cup title in 2015

and she was the second youngest player on that team. She was named best US player in 2017 and since the women’s soccer team is almost always the best in the world, this makes Julie one of the top players in the world. Zach says she is the best athlete in the family. So between their two high profile sport’s careers and the unique challenge of being apart from one another so often, they have more demands on their marriage than most couples will ever have.

Last Sunday I made a bold statement about this passage. I said that this passage is the theological solution to all marital problems. It may sound like that is such a huge promise that it must be an exaggeration, but I can and will back it up. And I can especially make this claim because these twelve verses do not stand alone. These twelve verses are the crescendo of the theological

### STRUCTURE OF EPHESIANS

1:7—we have redemption through his blood  
 Doctrine      CHAPTERS 1-3

**SEE who you are IN CHRIST**

2:25—love your wives, as Christ loved the church  
 Application      CHAPTERS 4-6

**BE who you are IN CHRIST**

symphony that is the letter to the Ephesians. In other words, the theological solution to all marital problems found in verses 22-33 rest upon the first half of Ephesians chapter five. But you know where I am going with this, right? Chapter five rests upon chapter four which in turn rests upon chapters 1-3. It is like I have been saying all along. See who you are in Christ and then be who you are in Christ

You cannot separate this passage from the rest of Ephesians. You cannot understand and certainly cannot obey verses 22-33 unless you are also practicing the rest of the book of

Ephesians. The theology in 22-33 is founded upon what came before it. So in order to be the husband or the wife that God intends for you to become, you have to have a good grasp on the whole book; your identity in Christ; the unlimited Holy Spirit power that is available to you; the unity of the saints who lend you support.

That's a big promise—that this contains the theological solution to all marital problems. I believe it is true but I need to give some nuance to the statement. First, a marriage is two people, not one. One of my favorite marriage books is titled, *When Sinners Say 'I Do'*. The title captures the essence of marriage, which is two sinners committing the rest of their lives together. My point is that even in a marriage, you can only control your own thoughts, feelings and actions. And that's hard enough, isn't it? We can have influence over our spouses. We can help one another to strive forward in our Christian walks, but we have enough difficulty with our own spiritual progress and ultimately cannot make our spouses change. So in this sense, even if you were to perfectly follow these principles, if your spouse does not, your marriage problems will persist. This is why I say that it is the theological answer to all marital problems. I would never promise a utopian marriage for all who listen to my messages. That's insane. But on the other hand, I am utterly convinced that this is the premier Bible passage on marriage and making even small applications will help and possibly transform your marriage.

So this promise rests upon all of Ephesians. However, 22-33 also has a lot of new theology in it. It must be grasped and wrestled with before you can truly make the applications that are required. It's new theology but at the same time, it is wonderfully simple. There are two basic commands in this passage, one for the wife and one for the husband. And each command to each person has a theological basis to it. Command to the wife followed by the theological reason. Command to the husband followed by the theological reason. The Paul wraps it all together after that in what he calls a "profound mystery." This passage is worth taking our time to do well.

I actually preached through Ephesians way back in 2002. Most of you were not here back then and even if you were, I doubt you remember anything I said over fifteen years ago. In fact, as I've worked through this book, I have never once looked at one of those messages. I didn't want to be overly influenced by them. I wanted something fresh. I'm sure my thoughts have changed and hopefully matured over the years so I haven't made use of them. But there is one thing I said back then that I think I got right. Over fifteen years ago I presented an application and vision to our congregation: How would you like to be known in our community as "the church whose husbands love their wives." I presented a vision of husbands sacrificially loving their wives to the degree that the average person on the street would be aware of this unique characteristic of our church; that whenever the name of our church came up in conversation, someone would comment, "I'm not sure what they are doing over there, but there is no question that the men in that church really love their wives."

Even if we had the best kids' programs in the tri-county area. Even if our worship was off the chain, none of that would have as much impact as being known as the church whose husbands love their wives. I'm convinced of that.

But why am I picking on the husbands in this idea? Remember, I did warn you last Sunday that I would probably lean in this direction. Let me give you several reasons why I chose this vision for our preferred future.

1. As I said last week, I am a man and a husband, so I will always tend to go harder on the men than I would on the ladies. It's just a brute fact.
2. The admonition to the husbands is longer than the one to the wives. It gets the most ink, if you will. There's more emphasis on the husband's role.
3. The husband is the head of the wife/family. The Bible designates him as the leader, and therefore, he should have more burden. It's a weightier responsibility.
4. There is no command to "exercise headship"! Did you notice that husbands? You are designated as the head of your wife but you are not commanded to exercise headship. You are not even told to lead, per se, in this passage. The husband is the head but his responsibility is to lead by loving and making the deepest sacrifices possible. Your power is not in your authority. It is in your love.
5. Those who hold to the Complementarian position—which I explained last week is the traditional position that has been held for over 1900 years—if we are to have this balanced. Biblical viewpoint and experience of marriage, then it has to be done well. In my opinion, the Egalitarians have it much easier. If you are teaching a fully equal role of marriage with no distinctions between husbands and wives, then there is a lot of wiggle room as to what this looks like. If you don't get the balance of responsibilities just right, it's not that noticeable because the roles don't matter as much. But if we believe and try to live that the wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, I believe this is the more difficult option. It's the right option but I think it's harder. So, all the more reason to do it well.
6. If I said that I wanted to be known as "the church whose wives submit to their husbands," I don't think that sounds so good. It emphasizes the wrong thing. To the world it communicates a servility. The world does not understand wives submitting to their husbands. They don't understand it and they don't like it. But here's what they do get. They understand husbands sacrificially loving their wives. A story to illustrate this that I will never forget.

During the time I preached through Ephesians, I helped to start what we called a Diversity Dialogue. The original group consisted of a Buddhist, an atheist, an interfaith minister, an agnostic, a lesbian and me. We met together about once a month for two years and had the craziest conversations you can imagine. I had many opportunities to share the gospel with them. I was able to be open with them and just told them flat out, that I was hoping and praying that each of them would be converted to faith in Christ.

One evening I shared this vision with this group. This vision about wanting to be the church whose husbands loved their wives. I spent two to three minutes giving a brief background to marital love by summarizing the gospel: "Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and

gave himself up for her.” I explained the eternal, intimate and unbroken fellowship that Jesus had with his Father. I spoke of the wonder and sacrifice of the incarnation. I repeated the truth of mankind’s utter lostness and undeserving status. I proclaimed the beauty, power and sacrifice of the cross of Christ. I explained that God wants Christians to understand this sacrificial love found in the cross and our hope that husbands would learn to love their wives with this kind of love. In short, that we could become known as “the church whose husbands love their wives.” After I completed my thought, one woman leaned forward almost out of her chair, looked me in the eye, and with great passion said to me, “If you had that kind of a church, then you would see some converts.”

Her words still resound in my heart to this day. She, and others, had refused to believe every aspect of the gospel message, which I had again summarized. However, this one application of the gospel—the sacrificial love of husbands for their wives—immediately resonated within her as something that was wholly true and very desirable. It was especially desirable since her husband had cheated on her and they were getting a divorce. Her enthusiastic response validated my vision for our church. But how does one create a church even remotely close to this vision? I can tell you this: it does not begin with a sermon series titled, “Five Easy Ways to Boost Your Marriage.”

The foundation for such a church is not the pursuit of pragmatism or a quick marital fix. The foundation must be the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians chapter five, the gospel is not an illustration of marriage, rather marriage is meant to be a living illustration of the beauty of the gospel and its inherent power to change lives. Sadly, though, the reality of failed and failing marriages in our churches loudly proclaims to the world of the futility of the gospel. Our love for one another is the visible manifestation that Christ has transformed us by his sacrificial love. The reverse is also true: the absence of this love for one another, particularly in marriages, is the visible manifestation that the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerless to change lives. Most church members may be afraid to “witness” to their family and neighbors about Jesus, but they cannot help but “bear witness” to Jesus by their marriages and relationships. In this sense, every Christian “witnesses,” but is their witness a true reflection of the gospel or is it an ugly distortion. The continual preaching and application of the gospel should result in relationships that continue to increase in holiness, integrity and love, which in turn serve as living, breathing illustrations of the exquisite beauty and utter necessity of the gospel.

Back in 2003 my non-Christian friends understood what so many in the church do not: healthy relationships speak of an inner transformation that is true and desirable. Do you long to see relationships which truly reflect the humility and love of Christ? Would you like our church to be known as “the church whose husbands love their wives”?

I mean this as a challenge but also as an encouragement. Here’s an encouraging word. In seventeen years, no one has ever gotten a divorce while they were attending Grace Church, Think about that. That’s a staggering statistic. I did some reading on divorce statistics. You tend to hear a divorce rate of 50% thrown around. Of course the likelihood that any one couple will divorce depends on a multitude of factors but a reliable statistic for the general population is that at least 40% of marriage will eventually end in divorce. It’s not 50% but it’s at least 40%. A

decently reliable divorce statistic for evangelical Christians is somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent, but again, it depends on a whole host of factors in the relationship.

So using that statistic, we should have had at least a handful of couples get a divorce. But the number is zero. I certainly don't take credit for this. But I will celebrate this. It's awesome. It's an unbelievable blessing. Obviously this does not mean that every marriage in our church is a model marriage but the Lord has preserved us by his grace.

So I hope that vision grabs you, that Grace Church could be known as the church whose husbands love their wives. That's a high calling and it won't happen by listening to a few sermons on the fifth chapter of Ephesians. But I do believe that is the best place to start. So start we will. That may have been the longest introduction to a sermon I have ever given! Even though I will be placing more responsibility on the husbands, Paul started this section addressing the wives and I will follow his pattern.

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To most of the world, the word submit is a six letter swear word. It is one of the most offensive words in their vocabulary, especially when used in reference to wives submitting to their husbands. Even those of you who truly want to understand and obey this teaching probably struggle at times. "What if my husband is not worthy of submitting to? What if doing so could actually cause harm?" Next Sunday I will address the question of abuse. This has to be addressed because among those who believe and practice the traditional view of marriage, some have terribly misused this teaching about submission. It's a vital teaching that must be upheld and practiced to the best of our ability but it has been used against women to their harm. From the start I want you to know that I get that. And as I said, I will specifically talk about abuse next week and how it relates to submission.

Some people hate this idea of wives submitting to their husbands because it has been abused but some hate it for the mere fact that it exists in the Bible. Maybe this will help, wives. I need to be honest with you and let you know that the word submit does not even appear in verse 22 in the original language. It literally reads: "Wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord." But the word submit is inserted from verse 21—submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. We know it is supposed to be there due to the simplicity of the Greek sentences. In fact, verses 21-23 all form one long sentence in the Greek. This means that almost all of the instruction to the wives in this chapter are linked to verse 21. This is yet another reason why "submitting to one another" cannot mean a mutual submission. Paul linked verse 21 with verses 22 and 23 into a single sentence.

**Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.**

These are inseparable. Also, if the Egalitarians thought for a moment that they could remove the word submit by appealing to this fact, they would jump on it in a heartbeat. But even they know it is not within the realm of possibility.

But using the word submit from verse 21 further cements how 21 and 22 go together. They are inseparable, which is why it is all the more important that we have a proper understanding of verse 21, as I shared last Sunday. And if you were not here last week, I strongly encourage you to [listen to or read that message](#) soon.

To wrap things up I want to share a quote from the book, When Sinners Say I Do.

It's not wrong to desire appropriate things like respect or affection from our spouses. But it is very tempting to justify demands by thinking of them as needs and then to punish one another if those needs are not satisfied. A needs-based marriage does not testify to God's glory; it is focused on personal demands competing for supremacy. Two people, preoccupied with manipulating each other to meet needs, can drive their marriage down the path of "irreconcilable differences." This is cultural language that simply acknowledges that a marriage can no longer carry the weight of demands understood as needs. Perhaps though, the saddest part of driving down the road of unmet needs is where we end up. The road of unmet needs leads to nowhere. It is a forlorn, one-lane stretch of me. All it leads to is more of me. It's worse than a dead end—it's a circle that never ends. But sinners who say "I do" have a different road to travel. It is the road of astonishing, undeserved grace—a grace so remarkable that it shows us the problem and then delivers the solution. Have you ever been on a scenic drive so beautiful that it was hard to keep your head from spinning from one vista to the next? The road of undeserved grace is like that. It is distractingly beautiful, because all of our true needs are met in breathtaking array in Christ. But it is a road of constant surprises, because we drive it with full awareness of our sin in light of the cross.<sup>1</sup>

**Rich Maurer**  
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<sup>1</sup> Harvey, Dave. When Sinners Say "I Do" (Kindle Locations 1024-1028). Shepherd Press. Kindle Edition.