

The Structure of a Healthy Home (Part 1): Husband-Wife Relationship

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Date: 12 May 2019

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[0 : 00] How would you describe the structure of your home? Now, first thing that goes through your mind with a question like that is something like brick or vinyl, wood, but that's not what I'm talking about.

I'm asking about something far more important, like the role of husbands and wives and parents and children.

This is the second of a series on building a healthy home. We looked last week at the foundation for the healthy home. Today we're going to look at the first part of the structure of a healthy home and focus on the relationship between husbands and wives.

We're going to turn to Ephesians chapter 5. Really it's verses 21 through 33. We're going to do this because this is the most extensive teaching in the New Testament on the role of husbands and wives.

From Ephesians 5.21 through chapter 6 verse 9, this is what is commonly referred to as the household code. How to live together in a Christian home, various kinds of relationships.

[1 : 20] I want us to begin with verse 21 because I think it's really vitally important to get this in our minds before we move into the details about wives and husbands.

Verse 21 talks about Christian relationships in general. Look at it. It's at the end of the paragraph in the ESV translation, in the New American Standard translation.

I'm going to be reading from the ESV. The end of the paragraph, verse 21, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Now, some translations in this room, the next paragraph about wives and husbands, it begins, submit yourself to one another.

Or submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. The NIV actually has it as a stand-alone sentence, sort of like its own paragraph. And the reason for this is this verse 21 is what's called a bridge verse.

It concludes the preceding paragraph that's been talking about what it means to live a spirit-filled or spirit-controlled life. It concludes what it means, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[2 : 51] And it also introduces the whole idea of Christian living in the home. If we really want to have the best possible relationships in the home, we've got to have this mentality, I'm in that home to serve you.

Whether it be your wife, your husband, your parent, your child, whoever. However, the idea is that when a Christian is filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit, he or she will seek to serve their family members.

And then Paul goes on beginning in verse 22 to describe how. But I think John MacArthur gets us started well with his comment on verse 21. Look at it with me.

He says Christian marriages and families are to be radically different from those of the world. Let me pause here. What we're talking about is the Christian home.

What we're talking about is God's design, even for today, for husband-wife relationships. Look on. The relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children is to be so bathed in humility, love, and mutual submission that the authority of husbands and parents, though exercised when necessary, become almost invisible.

[4 : 19] And the submission of wives and children is no more than acting in the spirit of gracious love. It's important that we begin here. Now let's move on to the instructions to wives in verses 22 through 24.

Read with me. Wives, submit 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Now, I can tell that the blood pressure has risen in some women out here right now. So let's go right to that word that got you all stirred up in verse 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. It's important that we understand what this word does and does not mean. As we go through this message this morning, you're going to detect that I'm trying to emphasize what the scripture does say and what it does not say.

[5 : 35] And I'm really going to focus in on the responsibilities of husbands, which is what the majority of this whole section is all about to begin with.

It's important that we understand what the word submit here does not mean. Number one, it does not mean obey. In chapter 6, children are told to obey their parents. Slaves are told to obey their masters. Paul knows the word obey. He uses it in this big context. But he does not use the word obey to describe how wives should respond to their husbands. Number two, submission does not mean doing whatever a husband demands. A wife should not, hear this, a wife should never submit to the demand of a husband that would cause her to sin. Wives should have the same attitude as the apostles when they refused to submit to the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem who told them, do not preach about Jesus anymore.

[6 : 44] Do not talk about the resurrection of Jesus anymore. Therefore, they were the duly appointed authorities. But the apostles looked at them and said, we must obey God rather than men.

That's in Acts 5. A wife should not submit to a husband who would abuse her or her children. Let me emphasize that. Women in this room, You do not have to remain in an abusive situation, you or your children, and think it's a part of your Christian responsibility.

It is not. Paul did not submit himself to abuse by Roman authorities when possible.

What he did is he exercised his rights as a Roman citizen. You can read in Acts 16, how Paul actually pitched a fit because he had been mistreated.

He had been beaten without a trial, without any charges really. He was a Roman citizen. He demanded recourse and he got it by the officials.

[8 : 00] There was another case where Paul, he didn't just cave in. He spoke up, told him, I'm a Roman citizen. And in that society, a Roman citizen had certain rights and could not be abused, could not be beaten as they wanted to do him.

So we have in Scripture examples of Christian leaders refusing to submit submit to anyone who might cause them, try to get them to sin or who was going to abuse them, harm them in any way. Submit does not mean that. Understand that clearly. Well, what does it mean? It means she must voluntarily choose to submit to her husband's leadership because the word for submit here means voluntary submission.

It could be translated, wives, submit yourselves. I want every husband in this room to understand, you must not, you have no grounds, biblically speaking, to ever look at your wife and say, do you know it's your responsibility to submit to me?

This would not be right, but she ought to just jack your jaw if you do that. That would not be right now. That would not be right. You can't abuse him just like he can't abuse you.

[9 : 27] But I just want to point out, some men like to quote this verse to their wife. Such a man is an idiot.

He really is. And if that's you, you are an idiot with a capital I. If that's how you talk to your wife, I want you to hear that. This is part of a Christian's wife, this is part of a Christian's, Christian wife's responsibility to the Lord.

Look at it. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. She doesn't submit to her husband as if he's the Lord. She submits as a part of her commitment to Christ.

A part of her being faithful to him is she follows these instructions. Some wives are married to men who are not worthy of her submission for various reasons.

But ladies, don't jump up and say, that's me, okay? Don't embarrass him here. It wouldn't serve a good purpose. The truth is, he may know that he's not worthy.

[10 : 45] He may know. He may feel very uncomfortable right now because he knows of some of the ways he acts or talks to you.

And he is not worthy of your submission. So here's what you need to do. Keep in mind that he is, that you're not ultimately submitting to him.

Ultimately, according to this passage, you're doing this as if you're working for the Lord. And God will honor that as you are doing it unto him.

Now, there's another reason given for why wives are to submit. Look at verse 23. 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. God has assigned husbands with the responsibility of being the leader in the home. That's what the passage is saying. But this does not mean that the husband is superior to his wife in any way.

[11 : 51] Both men and women are created equally in the image of God. Most of you know that. As a reminder, look at what it says in Genesis 1. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. That tells us all human beings are of equal worth, value, dignity, respect, honor.

All human beings. Everybody in your home created in the image of God. Therefore, it's wrong to think of the idea of being submissive as a put down to women, of women, as if they were somehow inferior.

That is not even implied in what is being taught here. We're going to come back to this verse at the end of the message. Let's move on now to the responsibility of husbands.

And this is where you have the lengthiest discussion. Look in verse 25. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word 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.

[13 : 16] In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body.

Therefore, this is what we looked at last week in detail. A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is profound and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now, I want you to note, men, there's a whole lot more ink being spilled here about you and the major point, I know you didn't miss it, you are to love your wife.

The major point and what we just then read is make loving your wife your priority. Look at these examples. Look again, verse 25, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

[14 : 30] Verse 28, in the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Verse 33, the first part, however, let each of you love his wife as himself.

When you go home today, men, I hope men and women, husbands, wives, you'll discuss this. But I hope men, you will be honest and your discussion will focus on what's most emphasized here, you loving your wife.

note two examples of how husbands are to love their wives in these verses. Number one, a husband should love his wife the way Christ loved the church. What kind of love is that?

Well, it's obvious. Jesus gave his life. We're talking about a self-giving love, a sacrificial love here. Giving your all.

That's what Jesus did for the church. Look at the next point. A husband should also love his wife as he loves himself. Paul says, but Christ nourishes and cherishes the church because the church is a part of his body.

[15 : 50] One of the ways, some of the ways the New Testament describes the church and Jesus, he's the head, we're the body. Sometimes we're just simply called the body of Christ. Christ loves the church, his people, his body.

He gave himself. That is our model. A husband should love his wife as he loves himself. A husband should love and take care of his wife just as he takes care of himself.

And we do like to take care of ourselves, don't we guys? We take care of ourselves, we take care of our stuff. Some of you might have been late coming to church today.

Some of you were close to being late. And I bet if we took a poll, it wasn't because the wife was running behind taking care of herself.

There's a lot of men in here, you spend a whole lot of time taking care of yourself because that's just what you do. That's what we do as men. We look out for ourselves.

[16:55] Paul is not commending that. He's just talking about that's just the way that it is. But here's the real point. In a marriage relationship, he talks about, he quoted it.

Well, we looked at last week. When you get married, husband and wife, you're no longer two, but one. That's God's design. We become one flesh.

And so, in taking care of our wife, like we take care of ourself, you see how it fits. We're one. And just as we take care of ourselves, we take care of her.

Now, let's apply this. Let's apply what Paul says about a husband loving your wife. Men, what would you do if you woke up in the night tonight and you heard what sounded like somebody trying to break in your back door?

What would you do? You wouldn't punch your wife and tell her to go check it out, would you? No.

[17:58] At least you wouldn't admit it. What you would do if you were any kind of a man is you'd get your gun, which you ought to have, and you would go and check it out and you would tell her to stay here and call 911 and get the other gun.

Because if he gets through me, you're going to take care of him. Right? That's what you do, men. There's not a man in this room, I don't believe, well, there may be, I've seen one or two squirrely guys here that you might would do this.

There's not a man in this room who would not willingly give up his life to protect his wife.

That's just what men do. That's what men, since the beginning of time, have been taught to do. And if you don't hear that anywhere else, you're going to hear it today.

That's what you, if you're a man, what you're supposed to do. Young guys, you are supposed to take care of your wife. She's supposed to be first.

[19:10] You're supposed to do whatever it takes to take care of her, provide for her, protect her. That's your God-assigned responsibility. But let me ask husbands, you'll die for her.

Are you willing to give up a ball game, a hunting trip, or a golf outing, in order to do something special with your wife that you know she really wants to do at the time you had the other thing planned?

Do you? Are you willing to give up an evening or a Saturday to take care of your little children and let your wife have the day or the night off?

do you? We're not talking about hypothetical things. What do you do to show your wife your love, sacrificial love, self-giving love, like the Word of God tells us we're supposed to do?

One of the best examples I've ever heard of of a husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church and as he loves his own body was demonstrated by the theologian Wayne Grudem. A lot of you know him, even have his books.

[20:34] We've studied them here. Several years ago he moved from Chicago to Arizona all for his wife. He described the process in an interview.

I want to read it to you. It's not going to be on the screen. I'm going to read it quick and you listen carefully. Grudem says, We moved to Phoenix Seminary in Arizona in 2001 primarily because of Margaret's health.

She had been experiencing chronic pain after an auto accident a number of years earlier and we found that the pain was aggravated by cold and humidity. Well, the Chicago area is cold in the winter and humid in the summer.

After a couple of trips to Arizona, which is hot and dry, we realized that Margaret felt much better there. So I phoned the academic dean at Phoenix Seminary and asked if there might be possibly a job opportunity there for me.

He says, I'm thankful to the Lord that when we were making a decision about whether to move to Phoenix, on the very day we were talking about it and praying about it, I came to Ephesians 5.28 in my regularly scheduled Bible reading and the Lord used this verse strongly in my own decision process.

[21:44] Here's the verse. In the same way, husbands, in the same way, husbands should love their wives as Christ's, as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Grudem says, after reading that, I thought it was important for me to move for the sake of Margaret's physical body, her physical health.

Now, what Grudem did not say in the interview is that when he moved from Chicago, he moved from one of the leading theological schools in this country, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He moved from there. He had arrived professionally by being on the faculty there. But he moved to Phoenix Seminary, a place that no one had ever heard of, a place that was just sort of like in the big scheme of things on the backside of nowhere.

Grudem's leaving Trinity to go to Phoenix would be like Dabo Swinney stepping down as head coach at Clemson to go to North Greenville University as head coach.

Nothing wrong with North Greenville, but it's a big fall from Clemson to North Greenville when it comes to football. I say all that to say, Grudem is an example of how husbands are to love their wives.

[23 : 04] It's self-giving. It's sacrificial. It's do whatever's best for her kind of love. Now with this understanding about husbands are to love their wives, we can now get a better understanding of what it means for a husband to be the head of the wife and the leader of his home that we started out in verses 23 and 24.

A husband's leadership must never be bossy, demanding, threatening, intimidating, those kind of things. Christian leaders don't lead by driving people.

A husband's leadership is more like taking his wife by the hand and lovingly guiding her. A Christian's husband, put it another way, is servant leadership.

That's how Jesus described Christian leadership in general. Look at me, look at this passage if you would, from Mark 10. And Jesus called them to him and said to him, talking to his disciples, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the son of man, talking about himself, came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[24 : 27] I want you to understand, servant leadership is not passive leadership. Servant leadership is not an unwillingness to step up and do what you're supposed to do.

Servant leadership is real leadership. It is effective leadership. In fact, there's no better example of an effective leader than Jesus Christ. What he started 2,000 years ago in his earthly ministry continues on and on.

We're here because of the effectiveness of his leadership. What will it look like when husbands leave and wives submit as we're looking at this morning?

Well, it's going to vary from home to home. We're all different. Men in this room, we're all different. Wives are all different. And each couple in here, we have our own uniqueness.

So it's going to vary. But here's what it doesn't mean. It does not mean that the husband makes all the decisions. I want you to understand.

[25 : 31] A Christian husband fulfilling his responsibility as the leader of the home does not make all the decisions. Ideally, husbands and wives need to come to mutual decisions.

And listen to this. And the one with the most expertise about any given matter should take the lead in that matter. A wise husband leader knows when to listen to his wife.

Knows that she knows some things that he doesn't. Knows that she has more experience or wisdom than he does about certain things. Lisa and I have been married for almost 41 years.

We got married when we were 10. In all these years we have never made a major decision that we did not agree on.

In some decisions Lisa has had the most input because she knew more. She had the more or the most expertise in the matter.

[26 : 40] And then sometimes she lets me decide. You're a little bit slow. Now here's an important point.

We're talking about the way you make decisions together. When a decision is made it is vitally important that you consider that a we W-E we decision.

If it turns out well we succeeded. If it turns out bad we fail.

Never blame your spouse when you make bad decisions as a couple. Never throw it up later on the bad decision that he or she made.

there's a lot of wives in this room that your main frustration is your husband won't make a decision.

[27 : 49] It's not that he wants to be the boss he won't make any decision. We're going to address that a little bit more in a moment. But I want to ask you did your husband used to make more decisions try harder but you always blamed him when something went wrong?

you always threw it back up to him a year two years later about that which went wrong? It may be he doesn't make the decisions that he used to make because he just doesn't want to listen to the complaining and the blame anymore.

And it could go both ways. It can go both ways. In a Christian home God intends for wives to submit to her husband's loving leadership as a part of her commitment to the Lord.

Wives are you seeking to do this? If not what needs to change?

Are you fighting your husband for the role of the primary leader to be the primary leader of your home? Is that the problem? I want you to understand I tried to point out what submission does and does not mean but no matter how you cut it God's design is for the husband to be the loving servant leader of the home.

[29 : 24] Don't fight that. That's not archaic. The word of God is not changed. But at the same time wives don't be a doormat. Don't take abuse.

Don't do what you know is wrong. Encourage your husband. Encourage your husband especially if he needs encouragement to lead to make decisions.

Encourage him as you follow his leadership. It may be you have to take small baby steps to start with and get him to start leading help him to do that. support him with your gifts and talents and wisdom.

And men don't be intimidated by your wife's abilities especially in the areas where she just knows more, has more experience, just wiser than you.

Look at that as a gift from God to you. Think about husbands and wives. When we come together, we're married, we become one flesh, her strengths, his strengths, they become our strengths.

[30 : 36] Don't be jealous, be thankful because she makes you better. He makes you better. That's the way God designed it to be. Listen to him.

Listen to her. Lead together. Husbands, are you seeking to be this kind of leader? What we're looking at this morning, if not, what needs to change about what you're doing?

Are you too passive? Are you too uninvolved? That is one of the primary problems in a lot of marriages. It's not that the husband's dictatorial.

It's not that he wants to do everything, make all decisions. A lot of the problems is men are lazy. Men are out of touch. Men are distant. Men are just selfish, taking care of themselves, and they expect the wife to do all the things that have to be done with the children.

They expect the wife to do everything to take care of the home, and in some situations, pay all the bills and do everything. If you're that way as a husband, you're a bum. You are failing your God-given responsibility to be the spiritual, servant, loving, leader who leads in your home.

[31 : 59] Now, of course, some men are too harsh, too dictatorial, too stupid to know they need to listen and not say something all the time, not make all the decisions.

If that's you, confess what sin needs to be confessed to God and to your wife and maybe your children. talk to your spouse, talk with your spouse, dialogue, renew some commitments, take on your God-assigned responsibilities.

Husbands and wives, what we've looked at is the God-designed structure of a Christian home. accept it, don't fight against it, accept it, and do your part to make it a home that pleases God, your spouse, and yourself.

Pray for your spouse to do the same. Don't preach to your spouse. Pray for your spouse, and pray for yourself. Ask God to help you to do your part to make living in your home, a peaceful, pleasant, joyful experience for everybody involved.

You want, as a loving leader, men, you want it to be that way for your spouse. Wives, you want it to be that way for your husband.

[33 : 45] Talk to God, seek His help, talk to each other, and work to either build or rebuild this God-given structure for your husband-wife relationship.

Let's pray together. Dear God, show us how we should respond now to what you've said through your word and your spirit to us. Father, for some people, they have been affirmed because they're seeking to do it your way.

No one does it perfectly. But Father, I pray that you will just affirm and encourage those who are seeking to be faithful to you and their spouse and their family in all this.

Father, for those who have failed for whatever reason, maybe never started, maybe started, but stopped, convict them, to come back to you in a renewed commitment, to seek your help to change, to humble themselves before their spouse, and seek forgiveness, seek help, seek dialogue.

Father, I pray for every single person in this room. Help them to see that this is what you intend for husband-wife relationships.

[35 : 18] Help them to seek to be that kind of husband, that kind of wife. And help them, dear God, to only look for a husband or wife who will accept your word and seek your help to put it into practice.

show us all how to respond. And Lord, if there are people in this room who are not Christians, help them to see that this can never take place until they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior and are filled with His Spirit.

Father, help Christians in this room to know that this will never happen if they're not seeking to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and obedient to His leadership, seeking your help to do the kind of things necessary day in and day out to have the healthy home you intend for them to have.

So just in an attitude of prayer, let's all just listen to the Lord and respond to Him. I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front during this time if you want to come as musicians play just for the next few minutes.

Amen.