

Lionhearted and Lamblike the Christian Husband as Head, Part 1

by John Piper

The sermon explores the biblical teachings on marriage, highlighting the importance of covenant keeping, the mystery of marriage as a copy of the relationship between Christ and the church, and the roles of husband and wife in a marriage filled with the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 41:08

Scripture: Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:21-25, Ephesians 5:28-30, Ephesians 5:33

Topics: "Christian Marriage", "Servant Leadership"

Description

This sermon reflects on the speaker's experience of his father's passing, expressing gratitude for his father's life and legacy. It transitions into a discussion on the importance of understanding the roles of husbands and wives in marriage, emphasizing the biblical concepts of headship and submission. The sermon highlights the need for husbands to lead with Christlike servant leadership, protection, and provision, while wives are called to honor and affirm their husband's leadership. The ultimate goal is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church through marriage.

Transcript

Before I pray, I want to say thank you to all the campuses and you here this evening for praying for me and for being so kind to support me in these days of being absent. It was a remarkable and high and holy privilege to be with my father at the very moment when he breathes his last in Greenville, South Carolina on the 6th of March. When parents have babies, they usually thank God for the gift of the baby.

And that's true, but it is the other way around, is it not, as often. That my father was a gift to me for 61 years of unspeakable proportion. And so I want to publicly thank God for him and say that emotionally, the way his departure has moved me most was not directly.

I didn't cry the night as I sat by his bed, I didn't cry. I sang and kissed him and waited and left. But I've cried over and over again.

You know what happens when I look at people? When people love me, when they say things about my dad, just about the legacy. He comes at me indirectly through people. That's a good thing.

I'm glad for that. And the last thing I think I would want to say is that with the death of my father, my mother's already gone. It felt like another very decisive root was severed with Greenville, South Carolina.

34 years this has been home in the Twin Cities. But it's funny how when your parents are living, home is kind of where they are, kind of. And that's not true anymore.

And I fully expect that I will not be buried in Greenville, South Carolina. I'll be buried up there, where that one is up north, or wood, wherever that one is down there. And in all likelihood I will lie right there, right there.

And that's the way I would like it to be. That's a remarkable thing, not to be buried where your parents are buried. 1,100 miles, another world.

And to raise your family in a church, and in a place, and that be home. And so that's a big sense of, as I came back to you, I felt like I was coming, in a really profound sense, home. So thank you very, very much for being here.

And I hope enough of you are still around in a few years to come to my funeral. I hope it's a very happy one. Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, Your Word is precious beyond estimation. And now we undertake to think about it. Herald it.

Exult over it. Understand it. And then obey it, and live it, and have our marriages transformed by it.

And our lives altered deeply by glorious things. What would I have done, had I not been able for two days, to read the Word of God, and sing the Word of God into my father's dying ears? What would I have done? Turn on the television? To a golf station, because he liked golf? Thank you for your Word. Thank you.

And now may your beauty rest upon me, as I seek lost marriages to win. And may they forget the channel, seeing only Him. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

If the Lord wills, today, and a week from today, we will focus on what it means for a married man to be the head of his wife, and the head of his family. For two reasons. Number one, verse 23 in Ephesians 5 says, The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church.

And we need to know what that means, so that we can exult in it, and live it, shape our marriages by it. The second reason is this. Few things are more broken today than manhood and headship in relation to women and families.

And the price of that brokenness is enormous in our culture. It touches almost every facet of life. So, for the sake of Biblical exposition and our exultation in His truth, and for the sake of the rescue of Biblical manhood and womanhood, we want to focus for two weeks on what it means for a married man to be the head of his wife and his family.

A little review about where we've been, since two weeks have elapsed since we were last on this. The emphasis has fallen, in the five weeks we've been talking about marriage, on the truth that staying married is not mainly about staying in love, it's mainly about keeping covenant. And we did eventually get to the point where we said, keeping covenant is the best pathway to being in love in forty years.

Even if you're not for the first twenty, or more likely, second twenty. And then you are again. That can't happen without covenant keeping.

So that's where the emphasis is falling. The first task of marriage is covenant keeping, not being in love. That's the second task.

And when you get first things right, second things get better. And then, we've spent the lion's share of our time trying to put foundations, gospel foundations, under the display of Christ in the church in marriage. We talked about the dynamics of vertical justification and vertical forgiveness and vertical forbearance coming down so graciously to us from God, and husbands and wives bending it out to live it with each other.

Forgiving and forbearing and having a compost pile where they can throw all the stuff that never changes and frustrates the living daylights out of you and you don't have to pitch your tent by the compost pile. There are paths and grassy knolls that one can spend a lot of time on, even if one has to go back to the pile every now and then and work on it again. And we talked last time, two or three weeks ago, that yes, in spite of the fact that we should forgive and in spite of the fact that we should forbear, yes, we should help each other change.

And there is a gracious way, a loving way, a humble way, a meek way, a hopeful way for us to grow together into the likeness of Christ. That's where we've been so far. So now the plan is to take two weeks on what it means that a husband is the head of his wife, and then it will be Palm Sunday and Easter, and we will take a break.

And then after that, between there and when I leave on writing leave in May, we will come back to the women and what the submission looked like and singleness and divorce, something like that. Whatever there's time to do, we will talk about those issues. So here we are.

This message is mainly foundation, and next week will be mainly application with regard to men being heads of their wives and their families. So let's go to verse 31. Start there.

We can go all over the place in this text. It's so rich, so profound, so wonderful. If you would just see it and feel it for what it is, you wouldn't need next Sunday's sermon.

You really wouldn't. Genesis 2.24 is quoted here in verse 31. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, hold fast to his wife.

The two shall become one flesh. Then verse 32, Paul says something about that Old Testament quotation. He talks about it this way.

He says, this mystery is great or profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Now why does he call a man leaving his mother and father and becoming one flesh with his wife a great mystery? The word mystery, many of you know this, in the New Testament does not mean something so deep and so strange and so perplexing that a human mind can't fathom it. That's not what mystery means.

Mystery means something that God in the secret counsel of His mind has kept at least somewhat to Himself through the run of redemptive history, but now displays for us to understand and enjoy and obey. So don't think mystery imponderable here. Rather think mystery revealed, once kept secret.

And then he explains what that is. What was kept secret for so long was that even though the Old Testament often described, or at least sometimes described, the relationship between God and His people as a marriage, it never talked about the Messiah that way. Now he says what marriage meant from the beginning was, and now is open for you to understand, Christ and the church.

That's the point of saying this, Genesis 2.24, is a great profound mystery, and now I'm telling you the mystery. It is Christ and the church. So marriage is a metaphor.

It's an image. It's a picture. It's a parable.

It's a model that stands for something. And what it stands for is the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. So the deepest meaning of marriage is that it's a living drama of how Christ and the church are to relate to each other.

Now this is confirmed amazingly in verses 28 to 30, so let's read those. It's confirmed with parallels that Paul draws between Christ and the church being one body and husband and wife being one flesh. He's unpacking the parallel here.

Verse 28, In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, because no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. In other words, the one flesh union between a husband and a wife means that in a sense, now they are one body, so that when a husband does anything for her, he does it for himself.

Isn't it amazing that Paul would draw that out? This union is of such a nature that a husband should think of a kind of application of whatever you would that men would do to you, do so to them. Only it's more profound than that. You do do this to you when you do it to her.

Let this sink in. This union means what you do for her, you do for you. Then verse 29, For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body.

See the parallel? What Christ does to the church, he does to himself, because we are his body. So as husbands nourish and cherish their wives, they do it to their own bodies. And when Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, he does it to his own body.

That's the parallel being drawn here between Christ, and how he ministers to his church, and the husband, and how he ministers to his own body, his wife. So when a husband cherishes and nourishes his wife, he cherishes and nourishes himself. And when Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, he cherishes and nourishes himself, because the wife is one flesh with the husband, and the church is one body with Christ.

Now all of that is intended to underline the mystery, the meaning of the mystery, which is that marriage in its deepest meaning is a copy. Of Christ and his church. If you want to understand God's meaning for marriage, you have to grasp that we're dealing with a copy.

Marriage isn't an end in itself. This is why marriage doesn't exist in the resurrection. It's a copy.

Copies aren't needed anymore, when the reality is fullest on its display. Here they're needed. The world is filled with a need for this very kind of marriage.

It won't be needed in the end. It's a copy. And what it's copying is an original, a reality, a truth.

So it's a copy of a greater original. It's a metaphor of a greater reality. It's a parable of a greater truth.

And the original, the reality, and the truth is God's marriage to His people, or Christ's marriage to His church. And the copy, the metaphor, and the parable is human marriage. Jeffrey Bromley, who wrote probably the best book on marriage I've ever read, and I haven't read many, and it's been long out of print, but I think we got it.

Jeffrey Bromley, one of my teachers in church history of all things, wrote a book called A Great Title. God and Marriage, a great title. And he said this, As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people.

That's exactly right. Pause here. Men, I said a minute ago, if you really got this text, if it landed on you, you wouldn't need next Sunday's message, the application one, because I really believe that even though application is appropriate and nitty-gritty examples are helpful and good and right for preachers to give, I don't think that's the main way preaching works.

I don't think that's the main way the Bible works. I think the main way the Bible works and preaching that is faithful to the Bible works is that the Bible displays glories that we are designed and made to know and which we don't know because we're in the cesspool of soap operas. And by the Holy Spirit, in a moment of illumination, all of that can be just driven out and something absolutely glorious enter into a human heart and change everything by virtue of its magnitude before any application ever arrives.

You're just changed. Your heart soars with a new sense of what you're on the planet for and what this woman in her magisterial dignity as your bride is about and what you're living for here. And everything changes when something lands on you with a biblical force.

That's what I would like to happen. I can't make that happen. Lift my voice.

I can lift my voice. But I can't make that happen. God can't.

So that's a little parenthesis to tell you how I think about preaching. I will give you application. But I have a little misgiving when somebody hears a sermon like this and their first response is, You ever give an example? Alright, I'll give an example, but is your heart exploding with the glory of marriage? Are you soaring? Will you by the end of this service just begin to take off like a little roadrunner? Take off so that from those new heights, she looks different, the kids look different, the job looks different, the planet looks different, life looks different, death looks different, the devil looks different.

Let me out of here. I want to live. Wonder changes people, not examples.

Lists and examples are a little bit helpful. But seeing glory changes everything. Close that parenthesis.

One of the things we learn from this mystery now is that the roles of husband and wife are profoundly distinct. Consider the way verses 22-25 talks. Just listen.

Verse 22, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife 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.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Now just pause there and let the obvious sink in. Husbands are compared to Christ.

Wives are compared to the church. Husbands are compared to head. Wives are compared to body.

Husbands are commanded to love like Christ, laying down His life. Wives are commanded to submit as the church submits to Christ. Now it's astonishing to me that there are people who read this paragraph who don't see that.

Egalitarians, that's the big fancy name for people who don't believe that manhood by virtue of God's design involves being in a unique role of leadership and headship in the home. They don't believe that correlation exists between manhood and headship. They read this and they put all of the emphasis on verse 21.

So I want to deal with verse 21 and then observe its relationship to the rest. Verse 21 is a glorious truth. Many of you need to hear this truth perhaps more than the rest of the verses but I doubt it.

But if that's the case, receive it. Verse 21 says being subject to one another. One another.

Both ways, right? And it's a participle. We're jumping in the middle of a sentence. I know that.

I told Chris, you can turn it into a verb so that it starts okay. And it's a participle because it's continuing verse 18. So let's read 18 to 21 and say what should be said about this participle.

Verse 18, second half of the verse. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the banner flying over this entire passage.

When that happens, you soar. You see. You change.

So, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We've been doing that with fervor.

Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, not just your head. Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus. Submitting.

See how it flows? Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Submitting to each other. The mark of a marriage filled with the Spirit is mutual submission.

Submit to one another. That's a mark of the Holy Spirit. Husbands and wives who are filled with the Holy Spirit serve each other.

They humble themselves and get down low and lift the other up. They find ways to submit their immediate preferences for comfort to the need of the other. That's what Jesus did on the cross for us.

He submitted His preference in the Gethsemane. Father, if there's any way out, my body would not like to suffer. If there's no way out, I will submit and get under and lift the church out of hell.

And He did. Praise God. So I say, Amen to the glory of verse 21.

I want to serve my wife. I want to get under my wife, not over my wife. I want to lift her up on my back and meet her need and fulfill her longings.

But, the problem is, egalitarians just stop there. Like the text is over. Like you don't need the rest of this text.

Like there's nothing more to fill up here. Like you can leave all these young people that come to Bethlehem who don't have a clue what headship means. I had one young woman come up and said, I've never heard this concept in my life.

Ever. Husband, head, what in the world does that mean? Wife, submit, what is that? It's just, it's a foreign language. So, we're just going to be egalitarians and say, yes, we've heard the word, go out, serve each other, love each other, there's no up, under, no hierarchy, no head, no submit, that's just, well, what boggles my mind is that every ordinary reader recognizes that after verse 21 summons us to mutual submission, 12 verses are devoted to differences in the relationship.

This is so easy to see. Not easy to do, but easy to see. And my longing for you is that you would recognize that you do not need to abandon verse 21 when you get to verse 22 or vice versa.

We are to be mutually humble, mutually ready to serve, mutually eager to meet each other's needs, mutually eager to build each other up, mutually eager to sacrifice for each other. Christ has changed everything. Christian message about men and women is radical in almost every culture in its beauty, for both.

What's astonishing is that egalitarians don't embrace the rest of the passage as though if you believe verse 21 you couldn't believe the rest of it. In fact, I could give you quotes from about three books that I'm aware of who say virtually that. If you believe in mutual submission, you cannot have anything like hierarchy.

They're mutually contradictory. Now that's not true and the easiest way to see that it's not true is this. Picture Jesus on the night before he died.

Remember one of the things he did? So beautiful. He took off his outer garment and he put a towel around him and he got on his knees like a slave, a bowl of water, smelly dirty feet of his bride, the disciples, and he washed them. He submitted, he got down low and lifted them up.

They were just absolutely mortified at this and he insisted that he do it and he told them to do that. Now here's my question. At that moment while Jesus is on the ground, was there one scintilla of doubt in that room who the leader was? Like, what's the problem with saying that mutual submission defines leadership rather than nullifying leadership? Why can't humility and servanthood and love and sacrifice stamp the meaning of leadership, govern it, control it, rather than killing it? Well, it can't.

And it does. And what I want to talk about in these weeks is what that looks like when leadership, headship, acts that way, is affected that way. What we have in Ephesians 5 is a crystal clear distinction between the role of the husband as head and the role of the wife as one who submits to, exalts in, glories in, partners with that headship.

It is a recovery of Eden. Headship and submission did not originate with the fall. I've preached a sermon on that in this church from Genesis 2 and 3 and I've decided not to include that in this series.

If you want to see it, you can go get it. I'm just going to assume it. Headship and submission did not originate with the fall.

What the fall did the sin of Adam and Eve was corrupted and ruined and turned it into something very ugly and very horrible in two different directions for both men and women. What it did for headship was to

destroy the humble, loving headship into either hostile domination and abuse or lazy indifference with a can of beer and a bag of chips till ten o'clock and then he asks for sex. Thank you for your help with the dishes and the house and the kids.

Do you want sex? So you can either be an abusive abuser of headship or you can be a lazy neglecter of headship. I thought when I came to the pastorate 27 years ago this would be my main problem. I would be dealing with women who were coming to me about abusive husbands.

Well, there are those. More than we know, probably. That has not proved to be the main problem.

Just because of our Christian culture. The main problem is women with broken hearts that their husbands don't lead. Don't take any initiative.

What it did to submission was also one of two things. It took willing and happy and creative and articulate and intelligent submission and turned it either into a manipulative groveling or obsequiousness or you drop the handkerchief. Can you pick that up? I can't bend down.

That silly, silly caricature of femininity or the brazen, stark, uppity nobody's opening the door for me kind of rejection of headship. There is a redemption. What happens in Ephesians 5 is that these distortions of headship and these distortions of submission are redeemed.

They're redeemed by the man being told bring your headship into conformity to Christ's way of loving and leading and providing for and protecting His church. And to the wives, bring your submission into conformity to what Christ calls forth from the church. And it isn't either of those things.

In other words, what's happening in Ephesians 5 is the recovery of Eden. How it was supposed to be before sin turned men brutal or passive and turned women into helpless know-nothings or strong brazen, get out of my way I don't need a man in my life anyway proud domination. There is another way.

In other words, what's happening here is not the dismantling of something sin created it's the rescue of something sin distorted. And it's beautiful when it happens. Let me give you two definitions of headship and submission and we'll be done.

Tell you where we're going to head next time. Here's my definition and this needs to be defended next week and illustrated next week. What does headship mean? Here's my definition.

Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christlike servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home. Every word counts in that definition. I'll read it again.

Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility I'd love to start unpacking them right now. For Christlike servant leadership lion hearted leadership and protection and provision in the home. Now here's what submission is.

I commend it to you women as something I believe you're made for in various kinds of relationships but especially in marriage. Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and to help carry it through according to her gifts. I'll read that again.

Submission is a divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and to help. She's called a helper. And to help carry it through according to her gifts which may surpass his in many.

So a good deal is at stake here husbands and wives, single people, old people, young people. A good bit is at stake here and I hope you take it seriously whether you're single or married and whether you're old or young. What's at stake is not just the fabric of society and the endurance of civilization.

What is more importantly at stake is the revelation of Jesus Christ in His relationship to the church. Marriage is a drama, a copy, parable, a metaphor of something greater than itself and the world desperately needs to see it. Father in Heaven, mainly what we men need right now is to see the wonder of this.

Just to feel the high calling of Christ-like servant leadership, protection, provision for our families. The display of Jesus Christ to our children and our wives by how we lead them. The display to the world of how Christ cares, loves, dies and leads the church.

So come and open the eyes of men and may they taste the wonder of this. May single men taste the wonder of this. Think through its implications for singleness in relation to women.

Lord, come. We need Your guidance. We need a close walk with You.

In Jesus' name.

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