

## The Renewed Family in Ephesians

By  
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As Dennis and I spoke earlier this year, we were planning a half-week meeting from the book of Ephesians. One of the sermons that I had planned for that series but had to cut for today concerned Ephesians' teaching on the family. How desperate our culture and too often the church is for loving families! Yet Ephesians reveals God's wisdom for families. Let us note:

*<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. <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. (Ephesians 5:22-33).*

I would be justified to close the article now and say, "There! Let's live this!" But let us meditate on this rich text a bit more meaningfully. So let me make a few observations.

First, the family is both grounded in creation while also pointing toward the end of God's plan for this creation. In other words, the family began in Genesis 2. No other social bond is as ancient or as important to God as that between husband and wife. At the same time, the family points toward God's plan for this creation. Revelation 19 tells of the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride. Indeed, "this mystery is profound," and in ways beyond our current understanding, marriage

points toward the consummation of all things. All of this to say, marriage and the family are foundationally important to God!

Second, husbands should follow the headship of Jesus Christ. The concept of headship has been so distorted in our culture that we have difficulty reading this without some level of skepticism. But let us consider, what was the nature of Jesus' headship? In one word, love. Notice that Paul's command is not that husbands direct and command their wives; rather, they are to love their wives. In figurative language that we often skip over or miss, the apostle Paul actually attributed some unusual masculine attributes to Jesus: doing the bride's laundry (i.e., washing her garments); bathing her (i.e., cleansing her with water); nourishing her (i.e., feeding); and cherishing her (i.e., holding tight as one would with a baby).

Such actions of Jesus are what few in our culture would think of when contemplating headship. We think of this in terms of power and privilege, but biblical headship calls for service and sacrifice. Husbands, let us love our wives as Christ has loved the church! Furthermore, note how much more is said to husbands than to wives in Ephesians 5. This extended length is not because husbands are more worthy but rather because we carry a great burden. A power-hungry husband can make his family's lives miserable, but a loving head can nourish his family to full maturity in Christ. Let us follow the headship not of our culture but of our Lord!

Third, wives should submit to their husbands. If my earlier comments were seen as counter-cultural, this claim is even moreso. Yet in Paul's day, we miss the part that would have been seen as counter-cultural: "as to the Lord." Telling a woman in ancient Ephesus to submit to her husband would be like telling a teenager today to check their Snapchat. In other words, the wives were already submitting to their husbands. In ancient Ephesus, women had no rights and were often seen a step above property. Paul is reappropriating their extant submission under the gospel. No longer must wives submit begrudgingly; rather, they can do so out of reverence for Christ.

And when viewed from this perspective, submission is a glorious gift in marriage. As the word *submission* means, a wife may "put herself under the mission" of her husband. And what is that mission? As we already noted, it is loving the wife and bringing the family to the full maturity of Christ. Is that a mission that a wife

should be able to put herself under? Of course! Moreover, Paul is offering a view of marriage that is loving and harmonious. May our homes be modeled after the renewed family of Jesus Christ.