

2023 Q3 Ephesians – Lesson 10

Husbands and Wives: Together at the Cross

by Linda Ojala

SABBATH

Love and Marriage, husbands and wives – what does the Bible say about it, what do we think about it?

Children ages 5-10 were asked about love and Marriage. Some of their responses were:

Love and Marriage:

- "My mother says to look for a man who is kind. That's what I'll do. I'll find somebody who's kinda tall and handsome." -- *Carolyn, age 8*
- "One of you should know how to write a check. Because, even if you have tons of love, there is still going to be a lot of bills." -- *Ava, age 8*
- "Love will find you, even if you are trying to hide from it. I been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me." -- *Dave, age 8*
- "Don't do things like have smelly, green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love." -- *Alonzo, age 9*
- "Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough." -- *Lynnette, age 8*
- "Be a good kisser. It might make your wife forget that you never take out the trash." -- *Erin, age 8*

What does the Bible say about it? Our memory text is from a letter Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (*Ephesians 5:25-27, NKJV*).

If we break this down, it might look like this:

Husbands, LOVE YOUR WIVES (HOW?)

- Just as JESUS LOVED the church
- AND GAVE HIMSELF for her (WHY?)
 1. That He might SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE HER
With the washing of water by the word
 2. That He might PRESENT HER TO HIMSELF
A GLORIOUS CHURCH
 1. Not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing
 2. But that she should be holy
 3. And without blemish

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

Does any of this look like what we see in most marriages today? Do we see husbands taking the leadership roll in the spiritual wellbeing of their wife and children, or do they just “bring home the bacon” and watch or play sports, pray the stock market, listen to politics, view pornography

Do we think God put men “over” women because he’s bigger, stronger and can overpower her; force her to comply? Or did God predict this is what would happen in selfish relationships after sin, but that women would desire a man’s love and protection anyway?

Do we understand that the husband’s leadership roll is as the Chief Executive Officer/CEO of his family corporation? In a corporation, the buck stops at the CEO. Whether the company succeeds or not reflects on his leadership responsibilities and skills.

Will God hold men accountable for how those under their leadership fared? Were their families nurtured and enriched to their full potential? Were they given a roll model to emulate and guidance for success in this life and the next, or were they selfishly used and abused, controlled and criticized?

I have seen both sides of the marital experience. I had an 18 year not-so-good marriage, and am currently in a 26 year much better marriage. I'm always learning, so, researching and teaching this lesson about marriage has been yet another learning experience for me.

I recall visiting a church shortly after my divorce years ago, when a minister there decried "all the young people getting a divorce these days". He asked what he and other ministers could do to help stem this tide? I had already taken note of this man before he talked with me, and saw the body language between him and his wife. He took no note of her whatsoever, like she wasn't even in the same room. So, I responded to him, "You can truly love your wife, and SHOW us what a loving marriage relationship looks like." I found out shortly afterward that he hadn't married his wife for love, but for the need to have a wife in order to get a job as a minister. My heart went out to both of them in such an unloving marriage.

There is no loneliness like the loneliness of a loveless marriage.

SUNDAY

Counsel to Christian Wives

So, we come to the submission of wives to their husbands, a sticky point to a lot of women.

Submission means, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

1. a: a legal agreement to [submit](#) to the decision of arbitrators
b: an act of [submitting](#) something (as for consideration or inspection)
also : something [submitted](#) (such as a manuscript)
2. the condition of being [submissive](#), humble, or compliant
3. an act of [submitting](#) to the authority or control of another

This week's lesson did a fine job of interpretation of scriptures where:

Paul invites **Christian wives to submit to "your own husbands, as to the Lord"** (*Eph. 5:22, ESV*), clarifying that he is discussing the submission of wives to their respective husbands (*see also 1 Pet. 3:1, 5*). When Paul says wives are to

do so “as to the Lord,” **does he mean a wife is to submit to her husband as though he were Christ; or, instead, does He mean that Christ is the truest and highest focus of her submission?**

In view of Ephesians 6:7, where slaves are asked to serve “as to the Lord, and not to men” (NKJV), and Colossians 3:18, where wives are asked to submit to their husbands “as is fitting in the Lord” (NKJV), the latter view is to be preferred. **Wives are themselves believers who must ultimately honor Christ over their husbands.**

In both Colossians and Ephesians, Christ — and only Christ — is identified as the Head of the church, which is His body (*Eph. 1:22, Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:18*): “Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (*Eph. 5:23, NKJV*). By analogy, **the husband is “the head of the wife” (*Eph. 5:23*), with the church’s faithfulness to Christ serving as a model for the wife’s loyalty to her husband. The passage presumes a loving, caring marriage, and not a dysfunctional one. This verse should not be interpreted to allow any form of domestic abuse.**

In “*Could It Be This Simple?*,” Dr. Jennings describes a case of his that I found very interesting. Page 54, *Marriage and the Law of Liberty*.

For those who value Ellen White, one of the founders of the church, she says:

If the husband “is a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term.” — Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 117.

Jesus is held up as our example, but was never married. Perhaps we can glean some insight by looking at Jesus’ example of servanthood and submission?

When the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” Mark 10:42-45

The wife is often looked on as treated as a servant of not only her husband, but her whole family. She may be made to feel as if she is less capable or not worthy of respect and appreciation.

“The best way to educate children to respect their father and mother is to give them the opportunity of seeing the father offering kindly attentions to the mother and the mother rendering respect and reverence to the father. It is by beholding love in their parents that children are led to obey the fifth commandment and to heed the injunction, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” Adventist Home, pg 198

“The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. **Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;** so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash **his disciples’ feet**, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” John 13: 2-5

NOTE: Every one of those disciples was going to betray, desert, or deny Jesus in some way that very evening!

So are we talking about servanthood in marriage, by both Husband and Wife?

Marriage as a Dance

Years ago, Ken and I went to a marriage seminar called, “Marriage is a Dance”. I think it was headed up by Ryan Dobson, the son of Dr. James Dobson. I checked online to see if these are still being done, but couldn’t find evidence of it. We had invited several friends of ours who we knew or suspected didn’t have the best of marriages. None of them came. We had a great marriage, but wanted it to be even better, if possible, so we went. I have been to marriage seminars run by women, and found that these men ran it with a completely different perspective.

We came away with at least 3 helpful ideas:

- **Think about marriage as a sports team.** On a sports team, does any one player win or lose? No! Either the team wins, or it loses. Where there are problems in a marriage, a solution should be sought that ends up in a win-win resolution. **Anything a couple can do to find that type of solution needs to be done....prayer, counseling, reading, asking for wise advise, research, etc.** If either one of you loses, you both lose. Your team loses. And if you love your spouse, would you always want them to be wrong? Would you always want to be made to feel you are wrong? Sometimes you are right, sometimes you are wrong. It’s important to find out that you don’t always have to be right. Anyone can make mistakes or be wrong. **Make yours a winning TEAM!**
- **Get a PHD in your spouse.** Heart Pillow! **At the beginning of a relationship, we want to know “everything” about them!** As time goes by, we think we do know everything about them; maybe even know them better than they know themselves, because we have a front row seat to all of their behaviors and words. It’s easy to look elsewhere for interest. Next thing you know, the couple is living more and more of their lives separated, until they are merely roommates. But do we box each other in, based on what they did or said in the past? Does that give us room to grow and learn in the relationship? How about finding new things to learn together, perhaps something neither of you have tried before? We should learn a lesson from Eve in the Garden of Eden....it was when she wondered off by herself that she lost the strength of the relationship between her husband and her God, and we lost our world to Satan. **Keep digging for the veins of gold in each other and learning new things TOGETHER!**

- **Being unfaithful happens long before actual adultery. Unfaithfulness begins when you create FEAR in your spouse. A wife longs for love and security. A husband longs for admiration and respect. That’s why the “do unto others what you would have them to unto you” text doesn’t work very well in marriage. Men and Women need different things. If these are denied, fear will enter into the relationship and self preservation and loss of intimate relationship with your spouse has begun; unfaithfulness has begun. Adultery is just then end point of that process. NO FEAR!**

MONDAY

The Church as the Bride of Christ: Part 1

As Paul, in Ephesians 5:25-27, 29, shapes his wedding-marriage metaphor for the church and its relationship with Christ, **he draws creatively on the customs and roles of an ancient wedding.** In relationship to the church as bride, Christ is the divine Bridegroom who:

1. **Loves the church as bride** (*Eph. 5:25*). We must never forget that this is heart work for Jesus. He loves us!
2. **Gives Himself as the bride price.** In the context of ancient wedding arrangements, the bridegroom would “purchase” the bride with the “bride price,” which was usually a large sum of money and valuables, so large that ancient village economies depended upon the custom. Christ pays the ultimate price for the church as His bride since He “gave Himself for her” (*Eph. 5:25, NKJV*). In the Incarnation and at the cross, He gives Himself as the bride price.
3. **Bathes His bride.** The preparation of the bride was an important part of the ancient wedding festivities. As is also true today, it was the bridesmaids and female relatives of the bride who prepared her for the ceremony. Paul, though, imagines the divine Bridegroom preparing His bride for the wedding! It is He who sanctifies and cleanses her “by the washing of water” (*Eph. 5:26, ESV*), a probable reference to baptism.
4. **Speaks the word of promise.** This cleansing is performed “with the word” (*Eph. 5:26, ESV*), pointing to the word of promise that the divine Bridegroom speaks to His bride, perhaps in the context of the betrothal ceremony (*compare Eph. 1:3-14, Eph. 2:1-10, noting God’s promises to believers at the time of their conversion*). Betrothal was the ancient version of modern engagement, but was a

much more serious set of negotiations, which included a written agreement about the bride price (from the husband) and the dowry (assets the bride would bring to the marriage from her family).

5. **Prepares and adorns the bride.** When the bride is finally presented to her Groom, she is fabulously beautiful, appearing in flawless splendor (*Eph. 5:27*). Christ not only bathes the bride; He prepares and adorns her as well. (**Show picture of modern day Indian Bride.**)

Story of Johnny Lingo

TUESDAY

The Church as the Bride of Christ: Part 2

Using one final element of the ancient wedding, in Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul portrays Christ as the One who:

Presents *the bride (to Himself!)*. In ancient times the bride would be given away by the best man, best men, or her father. Never by her groom! Here, though, Paul imagines Jesus presenting the church as bride to Himself.

Paul uses marriage customs and roles to highlight Christ's relationship to the church in an unfolding, chronological pattern: **1. Betrothal.** Christ offered Himself up for the church (as "bride price") and so became betrothed to her (*Eph. 5:25*). **2. Preparation for the wedding ceremony.** The attentions of the bridegroom continue in his present efforts to sanctify and cleanse the bride (*Eph. 5:26*). **3. The wedding ceremony itself.** Christ's present attentions are in view of the "presentation" of the bride at the wedding (*Eph. 5:27*). This last element looks to the grand wedding celebration at His return when Christ, the Bridegroom, will come to claim the church as bride and present her to Himself (*Eph. 5:27; compare 2 Cor. 11:1, 2; Col. 1:21-23, 28*).

Ancient weddings often began with a nighttime parade (*see Matt. 25:1-13*). The groom and his entourage would gather at the groom's home — the couple's new home — and with grand ceremony begin a procession. Lit by torches and accompanied by joyful, lilting music and great rejoicing, the crowd jostles toward the home of the father of the bride. Gathering up the bride there or meeting the bride's own procession on the way, the parade would convey the couple to their new home, where the guests would settle

into a **weeklong feast**, culminating in the wedding ceremony, when the bride would be presented to the groom.

When Paul portrays Christ presenting the church to Himself, he alludes to this grand parade and to the moment of presentation. In doing so, he provides a moving portrait of Christ's return as a future wedding ceremony, when the long betrothal between Christ and His church is complete and the wedding celebrated.

WEDNESDAY

Love Your Wife as You Do Yourself

Paul's rules for the Christian household (*Eph. 5:21-6:9*) disclose a challenging social context. In Ephesians 5:28-30, Paul addresses husbands who, following the all-too-frequent pattern of the time, may choose to "hate their own flesh" (*see Eph. 5:28, 29*), abusing and beating their wives. In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, the legal power of the "father of the family" (Latin, *pater familias*) was very broad. He could punish harshly or even kill his wife, children, and slaves and be within his legal rights (though exercising such power in extreme ways was increasingly constrained by public opinion).

In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul has detailed the ultimate example of love, Christ's love for the church, offering a drastically different model for husbands than the usual one. Now, before laying out a new argument, he points again to that great Example, asking Christian husbands to respond "in the same way" (*Eph. 5:28, ESV*) as Jesus, who "gave himself up" for His bride, the church, and attends to her every need (*Eph. 5:25-27, ESV*). **Paul challenges Christian husbands to turn from the expected practices of their time and seek to match Christ's tender love.**

In Ephesians 5:28-30, Paul adds a new rationale to support the love of Christian husbands for their wives: Self-love. Paul offers a truism: "no one ever hated his own flesh" (at least no one thinking clearly). Husbands don't harm themselves or beat up on their own bodies. Instead, they "nourish and cherish" them (*Eph. 5:29, NKJV*). **In a bid to eliminate harshness and violence against Christian wives,**

Paul invites the Christian husband to identify with his wife. You are so much one with your wife, Paul argues, that to harm her is nothing short of inflicting self-harm, and most people in their right minds don't do that.

Returning to the example of Jesus, Paul argues that Christ is Himself practicing tender self-care in cherishing believers who are "his body" (*Eph. 5:29, 30, ESV*).

Model your behavior toward your wife, says Paul, on the way you treat yourself and, ultimately, on the way Christ treats you.

I once read the book "Princess" by an unnamed Arab princess, who was too afraid to give her name, but she wanted people to know what life was like for many Arab women, and for Muslim women. Before then, I hadn't really given much thought to the day-to-day life of Arab women. To say I was shocked would be an understatement! I learned that Women are submitted to men in the following ways, just to give some examples:

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1. If their husbands are displeased for any reason, the wife can be locked in a room the rest of her life, can be drowned in the backyard pool, or killed in other ways with absolutely no legal issue at all.
 2. If a male is in the house and tries to be friendly with her, say a friend of a girl's brother, she could be accused of sexual misconduct, even if nothing happened, and stoned to death, but not him of course.
 3. They stone by digging a hole in the ground until just the head or upper shoulders show, once she is thrown in there. She can't get away from being stoned to death.
 4. When out of the house, women must wear a hijab or head scarf covering in some Arab areas, or a Burka full body covering over their clothes in others, no matter how hot it is, or how black the Burka is... would be like being in an oven.
 5. Before a girl marries, the women of the potential husband come and physically inspect every part of the girl to make sure there are no defects.
 6. The girl is thrown a party when she hits puberty, and at the party, without warning, the female relatives hold her down while her clitoris is surgically removed, often without any numbing agent at all. They do this so that women will not enjoy sex and therefore not be promiscuous. Scars form and she will have painful sex the rest of her life. What these husbands are missing out on!
 7. Women wear a lot of gold jewelry, because at any given moment, the husband can throw her out, and all she has on is all she can take with her to live on.

8. The husband holds her passport, if there is one, and must give his permission for her to travel. She can't drive herself anywhere (which would be hard to do wearing a burka anyway, or walk anywhere without a family escort).
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We can see that Jesus gave respect to women, which wasn't always the case in His day, or even in ours.

THURSDAY

The “One Flesh” Model of Marriage

A key to applying Paul's counsel to wives and husbands is to see his citation of Genesis 2:24 (*in Ephesians 5:31*) as the culmination of it. As he meditates on the Creation story of Genesis, Paul considers the needs of Christian congregations and the health of family relationships within them. He hears in Genesis 2:24 a message that echoes down through time. **By divine design, marriage is intended to be a “one flesh” relationship, with sexual unity mirrored in emotional and spiritual unity, and emotional and spiritual unity bringing meaning to the sexual relationship.**

Note that in choosing Genesis 2:24, Paul selects a statement about marriage made before the Fall and applies it to the relationships between Christian husbands and wives. **In our distinctly post-Fall world, rampant exploitation of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman reveals how deeply entrenched in modern cultures is the idea that the sexual union represents subjugation of the woman. Paul argues that the sexual relationship, as reflected in Genesis, is not one of subjugation but of union. It does not symbolize or actualize the dominance of the male but the union of husband and wife, so much so that they are “one flesh.”** We may look to both Ephesians 5:21-33 and Genesis 2:24, then, for an important, countercultural, and corrective theology of marriage and sexuality.

In this same context, Paul in the next verse talks about a “profound mystery” (*see Eph. 5:32, ESV*). This includes both sides of the double metaphor Paul has been discussing: Christian marriage understood in the light of Christ's relationship with His church (*Eph. 5:32*) and Christ's relationship with His church understood in the light of Christian marriage (*Eph. 5:32*).

Christian marriage is elevated by comparing it to the relationship between Christ and the church. In addition, by thinking of the church's relationship to Christ through the lens of a caring, Christian marriage, believers gain new clarity about their shared relationship to Christ.

FRIDAY

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. **It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies.** Patriarchs and Prophets, pg 34, 35

Ellen G. White consistently urges marriage partners to turn away from efforts to control the other: **“Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other’s love.** Be kind, patient, and forbearing, considerate, and courteous.” *The Adventist Home*, p. 118.

She comments directly on the interpretation and application of Colossians 3:18 (*and Eph. 5:22-24*):

The question is often asked, ‘Shall a wife have no will of her own?’ The Bible plainly states that the husband is the head of the family. ‘Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.’ If this injunction ended here, we might say that the position of the wife is not an enviable one ... **Many husbands stop at the words, ‘Wives, submit yourselves,’ but we will read the conclusion of the same injunction, which is, ‘As it is fit in the Lord’ [Col. 3:18]. God requires that the wife shall keep the fear and glory of God ever before her. Entire submission is to be made only to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has purchased her as His own child by the infinite price of His life There is One who stands higher than the husband to the wife; it is her Redeemer, and her**



submission to her husband is to be rendered as God has directed — ‘as it is fit in the Lord.’ *The Adventist Home*, pp. 115, 116.

Our marriage relationship and our homes should be a piece of heaven on earth, and show others what that looks like by our example!