

# Relational Blueprints: Christian Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-33 on March 13, 2022

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*Please read Ephesians 5:21-33 before going further in this transcript.*

Today we're beginning a 3-week sermon series called "Unchanging." We'll begin with a sermon on "Relational Blueprints: Christian Marriage." On March 20, we'll talk about "Endurance: Our Spiritual Marathon." And then, on March 27, our final sermon will be on "Sustainability: The Vine and the Branches." In this series, we're going to consider some things that are changing, and some other things that are UNchanging. Some changes can be good, but some changes are not so good. There has been an incredible volume of change in our world lately:

- > Of course, there's the ever-CHANGING COVID-19 pandemic.
- > Changes in the workplace and worker shortages and supply shortages.
- > Changes in politics, including incredible division within our nation.
- > Changes in race relations, including incredible hostility and tension.
- > Changes in inflation and prices at the gas pump, not to mention the mounting stress over the war between Russia/Ukraine.
- > Changes in morality, in what our society considers right and wrong; including the very definition of marriage itself. (*We'll come back to this one.*)
- > Finally, changes in churches. As a pastor, this one probably breaks my heart the most. Churches that are changing because they are not responding well, to all the changes in our world. Churches that are latching on to ungodly solutions, like redefining what is morally right. I could go on, but I won't, because here's the point: How should fully devoted followers of Jesus respond, in the midst of all this chaotic change? Well, certainly NOT with fear. Certainly not by hiding, by hunkering down and sticking our heads in the sand until the chaos is over. And certainly NOT by attacking, by lashing out in an angry hissy fit, or in civil unrest and physical violence. So then, how should we respond? How indeed...

God's Word has the answer for us. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 urges us, "So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter."<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 agrees, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love."<sup>2</sup> In other words, in the midst of a world that is CHANGING all around us, Christ-followers are called to "stand firm and hold fast to the teachings" of God's Word. We're taught to "stand firm in our faith" and to "do it in love."

In His goodness and sovereignty, God has given us blueprints for how He's designed human relationships to work. These blueprints haven't changed. We find them all throughout Scripture, in places like:

Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 2:13-3:12; and Romans 13:1-10.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:16 urges believers to "hold firmly to the word of life."

<sup>2</sup> So even as we're told stand firm, we're reminded to do everything in love.

- > God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>3</sup>
- > God urges children to honor their father and mother.<sup>4</sup>
- > Followers of Christ are urged to be subject to our governing authorities.<sup>5</sup>

And so on... all kinds of “Relational Blueprints” for us to follow.

In an ever-changing world, these blueprints have NOT changed. This unchanging reality not only offers us genuine comfort and stability, it also offers us clear direction for how to keep living for the Lord in the midst of these changing times. Today we’re going to zero in on one particular relational blueprint: Christian Marriage.

Marriage is one of God's good gifts to humankind. Unfortunately though, today’s culture is quickly moving away from God’s design > to their own designs. Many people in our world today are undermining God’s blueprint. Even questioning God’s goodness and His sovereign right to declare His design for marriage.<sup>6</sup> The verses you just read from Ephesians 5, are built on the foundation of God’s design for marriage to be between one man and one woman, not any other combination. This design goes all the way back to the very beginning of creation. Genesis 2:18-25 teaches us that “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Genesis 2:24 is quoted in Ephesians 5:31, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” And so we see that God had a relational blueprint for marriage from the very beginning of creation. One man and one woman becoming one flesh, naked and unashamed. This blueprint continues all throughout the Old Testament right up through into the New Testament.

Recently, I was deeply saddened when I saw a post on social media by one of my Christian friends. I grieved, even groaned out loud, as I read her post declaring her same-sex relationship with another woman. She was so proud of this union, so happy to declare it as a wonderful thing. As much as I care about this person, and want to be happy for her, I just can’t. You see, God’s Word is very clear, all throughout, that same-sex behavior is not part of God’s design. The fact is, same-sex behavior is rebellion

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<sup>3</sup> See Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39, and Romans 13:8-10.

<sup>4</sup> See Deuteronomy 5:16 and Ephesians 6:1-3.

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7.

<sup>6</sup> In other words, there are some who have the audacity to think that they know better than the one true God who created us.

against God's design, and that makes it sinful. Now, if you or someone you know is struggling with same-sex attraction, my heart goes out to you. I can't even imagine how hard this much be, but I want you to know there is help available. Just like any other struggle with sin, our pastors are available to talk, to pray with you, and to offer godly resources. So don't struggle with this on your own, let someone help you. To be clear, feeling tempted toward same-sex attraction is not sinful, but acting on that temptation is. So, a godly path forward for those who struggle with same-sex attraction is abstinence, and choosing sexual purity. This is the same advice I would give to those who are attracted to the opposite sex. God is honored when His people resist temptation, when we abstain from sex outside of God's marriage design.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." In other words, God's relational blueprint for Christian marriage should be honored by both; by those who are same-sex attracted as well as by those who are opposite-sex attracted.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul teaches the Corinthian believers, "...Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." You see, the fact that Paul begins with the words, "Do not be deceived," makes it clear that it wasn't just an issue of disobedience, it was also an issue of being deceived. Deceived about a lot of different sins, including homosexuality. So Paul writes not just to warn them about sin, but also to rescue them from being deceived. Even up to our present day, people continue to be deceived about what is sinful, and what is not. But God's Word makes it clear for us. I love the hope and encouragement we find in the very next verse. 1 Corinthians 6:11 says, "And that is what some of you WERE. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." You see, verse 11 is in the past tense. Some of you WERE sexually immoral and idolaters, but you were washed. Some of you WERE adulterers and practicing homosexuals, but you were sanctified. So the Christians back then encountered similar challenges to the ones we face today. There's a lot of deception around us, but praise God we have His Word to teach us, and to rescue us from being deceived. This is why we need to HOLD FAST to the teachings from God's Word!<sup>8</sup>

We also need to hold fast to the teaching from Ephesians 5:21-33. Ephesians 5:21 begins, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The topic of submission causes quite a few ripples in our modern-day society. Some of you may remember that I preached from this Ephesians 5 passage back in 2017. This was about 9 months before the "MeToo Movement" went viral when Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault victims went public.<sup>9</sup> This is just one of the many examples of mistreatment of women

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<sup>7</sup> See 1 Peter 2:11. I preached on sinful desires back on February 27, 2022. <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/return-to-the-lord/>

<sup>8</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo_movement)

in our society today. Understandably, realities like this cause a strong reaction, and they should. All of us need to rally around these women and support them. We need to say publicly, “this kind of behavior is absolutely WRONG!” Men who commit these atrocities should be held accountable to the full extent of the law. In fact, men should be holding other men accountable way before it ever goes this far.<sup>10</sup> Men should call each other out when someone tells a dirty joke, objectifies a woman, or shows any other signs of misogyny.<sup>11</sup> This is NOT socially acceptable behavior, and it should NOT be tolerated.

Unfortunately, these modern-day abuses are making it increasingly difficult for men and women to get along. In place of respect, we often find hatred and mistrust of men.<sup>12</sup> One of the unfortunate side effects of living in a society where there is frequent devaluation of women, is that it makes it hard to talk about biblical submission. Even fully devoted followers of Jesus might pause... and reconsider whether submission *really* is part of God’s “good” design. This can lead us to the unfortunate practice of rejecting certain parts of God’s Word, or at the very least, trusting them less.

With this social context in mind, let’s take a look at God’s blueprint for husbands. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” God has put an amazing call on the life of every husband, to love his wife *just as* Christ loved the church!

Verses 26-27 articulate the details of Christ’s example, how He supports His bride and builds her up. Verses 28-29 then goes on to further clarify that husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies; to provide and care for them *just as* Christ does the church. These verses are an obvious contrast to the womanizing we see in certain parts of our culture today. These verses place a high value on women. So if Christian men show any signs of devaluing women, or misogyny, or even abuse toward women, it’s not because God’s blueprint is flawed, it’s because the men are flawed. It’s because we men have failed to build our marriages according to the specifications of God’s design.

A blueprint is a “visual representation of how an architect wants a building to look.” It specifies “a building’s dimensions, construction materials, and exact placement of all its components.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, God is the architect of marriage. He wants a husband’s love for his wife, to look JUST like Christ’s love for the church. By the way, verse 25 is not a suggestion; it’s a command from God’s Word! In verse 25, the verb

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<sup>10</sup> See Proverbs 27:17.

<sup>11</sup> See Ephesians 5:3-4.

<sup>12</sup> At times, we men have failed to defend women with justice and to rescue them from various abuses. There is an urgent need for more of us men to turn our eyes away from pornography and toward an attitude of absolute purity; toward matters of love, kindness, and protection of women. And so to any women who are reading this message, I apologize for the way our society has failed you. And I want you to know that our church is committed to helping women in any way that we can.

<sup>13</sup> Google search of “define blueprint.”

for “love” is a present active IMPERATIVE!<sup>14</sup> So, it’s fair to say that husbands are called to submit, to submit to this command from God’s Word, to “give themselves up” for their wives. Therefore, a husband should put his wife’s needs, her very life, before his own.<sup>15</sup> If you are a brother in Christ reading this, those of you who are currently husbands or those of you who hope to become a husband one day, we take our cues directly from our Lord Jesus. A key point, in our spiritual growth and development, is learning to die to ourselves every day.<sup>16</sup> We must cultivate a heart of sacrificial love for our wives. As we learn to embrace this beautiful and challenging design, we will find ourselves growing spiritually, by leaps and bounds, into the strong, godly men that God intends us to be. This part of God’s blueprint is vital to our understanding of biblical submission and the beauty of Christian Marriage. It’s built around the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

With this in mind, let me make a very direct application. Christ did not abuse or neglect His church; He took abuse and suffered neglect on her behalf! He took the physical, emotional, and mental pain upon Himself; He did not dole it out upon her. Christ did not use His power and position as something to be wielded over His Bride. He bore His power as a responsibility to sacrificially serve in the church’s best interest.<sup>17</sup> And He did this gladly, out of love. So submission is not a hammer to be used by husbands to force their wives to obey them. This would be directly opposite of the beauty and glory of what Christian marriage is intended to be. Husbands, we should never, ever abuse our wives! We should not physically strike her, verbally attack her, or emotionally

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<sup>14</sup> ἀγαπάω = “① to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love.” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 5). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

<sup>15</sup> I hesitate to go so far as to say that husbands should submit TO their wives though. Here’s why: In Ephesians 5:21, we find the verb “ὑποτάσσω.” Then in the following verses, 5:22-6:9, we see a picture of various roles and functions in the orderly operation of household relationship structures: wives submitting to their husband’s lead, children honoring and obeying their parents, and slaves obeying and working hard for their masters. The verse 21 reference to submitting to ONE ANOTHER is not suggesting mutual submission in every relationship structure. This would render the very concept and range of meaning for submission irrelevant. (See O’Brien’s discussion of this on p. 402) For example, verse 21 is not suggesting that even as children submit to their parents in Ephesians 6 that parents should then also mutually submit to their children. Nor are masters being urged to mutually submit to their slaves later on in Ephesians 6. They are however reminded that they also have a Master in heaven and that they should treat their slaves well in reverent fear of God. Therefore, “the pronoun ‘ONE ANOTHER’ is not always fully reciprocal.” (See O’Brien, p. 403) So when verse 21 says “ONE ANOTHER” it is saying that each Christ-follower should submit himself or herself appropriately in whatever relationship structure they find themselves: wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters, and so on. We could just as easily include citizens to governing authorities. Autonomy and independence can be very good things, but we need to be aware of the danger of shedding all relationship structures. Many of these structures are God’s good design and His loving provision for the people He has created. God created people to exist in relationships; to thrive in a social environment built on mutual respect and orderliness. The freedom and independence of the American psyche does not tend to embrace all the good aspects of God’s plan for social interactions, peace, and harmony. And that’s our loss; it’s to our own detriment.

The above said, this should be held in check by our understanding of verses like Ephesians 4:2, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” And, Philippians 2:3-5, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

<sup>16</sup> See Philippians 2:1-8.

<sup>17</sup> See John Piper’s sermon from November 24, 2012, “God Created Man Male and Female” at

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-created-man-male-and-female-what-does-it-mean-to-be-complementarian>

abandon her. She is our bride just, as the Church is the Bride of Christ. 1 Peter 3:7 warns us, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” In other words, the very effectiveness of a husband’s prayers is impacted by the way he treats his wife. Men, we shouldn’t even bother to ask God for anything, until we’ve begun to show our wife the consideration and the respect that she deserves.

Some of us men might think we can get away with doing whatever or saying whatever we want to, in the privacy of our own home. But God sees right into our homes, and right into our hearts. And He will hold us accountable.<sup>18</sup> On the day of judgement, he will tell you to brace yourself like a man and answer for any of the ways you mistreated your wife.

If you do not repent, and change your behavior now, you will find yourself suffering under the wrath of God.

And women, if you or someone you know, is suffering in an abusive relationship, I urge you to get out! You are not expected to submit to that. That is NOT Biblical submission. Our Loving God does not expect you to endure abuse!

Now that we’ve clarified God’s blueprint for husbands, let’s take a look at His blueprint for wives. Ephesians 5:21-24 says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” Wives, your husband needs your respect and support, as the leader of your home. Your encouragement, your prayers, and your devotion mean the world to him. Genesis tells us that it wasn’t good for man to be alone. Yes, some of us are called to remain single, but most of us men need a marriage partner. We’re sinful and imperfect men, but most of the men in this church are trying to be the godly head of our homes. As we strive toward our sacrificial calling, we need to know that you’ll voluntarily follow us. That you’ll stick by our side for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

According to verse 21, wives can show reverence for Christ by voluntarily submitting to their husbands.<sup>19</sup> Since it’s an act of reverence, that means it’s important to your own spiritual growth and development. As you choose to submit to your own husband, you

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<sup>18</sup> See Jeremiah 17:10.

<sup>19</sup> Some people make an argument for Ephesians 5:22-24, wives submitting to their husbands, to be a “time-bound” practice. In other words, they argue that this may have applied 2,000 years ago specifically to Christian wives in Ephesus, but it no longer applies today. However, even if one was to concede that this principal of submission is timebound, and not a timeless principle, that would still mean that, at one time in history, it was indeed God’s GOOD gift to marriages in Ephesus. That said, the case for making submission a timebound principle is unconvincing. Furthermore, it creates a major interpretative problem for what to then do with the rest of the passage. In other words, is the husband’s sacrificial love for his wife then also timebound to 2,000 years ago? Does it then follow that husbands no longer need to love their wives as themselves, or to give themselves up for her as Christ did for the church?

are, in that very act, submitting to the Lordship of Christ in your life. In other words, respecting your husband is one way that you serve the Lord, and grow into the mature woman of God that He wants you to be.<sup>20 21</sup>

God's "Relational Blueprint for Christ Marriage" is summarized by bringing the two together in Ephesians 5:33, "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Love and Respect is God's beautiful UNCHANGING design for marriage. Sadly, we seem to be getting further and further away from this. But we need to HOLD FAST to this teaching from God's Word. We need to move toward it, with faith and trust in God's sovereign design. Love and respect flow from a mutual reverence for Christ. Husbands and wives can bring God glory together, as they each trust in Him, as they each follow through on their part of the blueprint. No one said that Christian marriage was going to be easy,<sup>22</sup> but when the blueprint is rightly followed, it displays the beauty of God's design.

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<sup>20</sup> O'Brien, p. 412.

<sup>21</sup> Consider 1 Peter 3:1-6.

<sup>22</sup> See second half of 1 Corinthians 7:28.