

Ephesians 5:21-33

Keys to a Happy Home - Mandates to Mates

This message begins a series on keys to a happy home. Many homes and marriages today could be described like the woman's club meeting where the speaker asked the women gathered how many would want to mother their husbands. One member in the back row raised her hand. This shocked the speaker who asked, "You really would want to mother your husband?" "Mother?" the woman echoed, "I thought you said smother!"

It has been accurately said that marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handsprings or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it. But God has given us a word that provides the keys to having a happy home. In this message we will look at mandates to mates and in future messages we will explore such topics as duties for dads (and moms are included too), chores for children, and tasks for teens.

Notice first of all **the rule of marriage - the principle of mutual submission**. Verse 21 says "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" Submission is usually defined as wife to husband, and indeed Paul proceeds to discuss the submission of the wife to the husband. Yet the context clearly indicates that verse 21 belongs with this passage as well. That which follows verse 21 (the roles of husband and wife) are the practical outworking of mutual submission. Note verse 22 (if you have a good study Bible) - *be subject* is in italics. That means that it is not there in the original text. It is understood from the context. Hence the topic of the wife's submission to the husband is merely an outgrowth of the concept of mutual submission.

You know all of us have areas where submission is necessary! Even the husband to the wife, at times! We misunderstand submission. Many men demand submission. I think that is because of our inherent selfishness. Yet submission is something willingly given; it is NOT something to be demanded! And, regardless of what people say, it IS a two way street!

For example, my wife has jurisdiction in our kitchen. She likes to fix shepherd's pie for meals. Personally, I detest shepherd's pie. Now, selfishly, I could say "woman, don't ever fix that slop again. And get up, and make a decent meal!" Or I could just accept her leadership in that regard and eat the shepherd's pie! Does that mean I am not a man because I do not tell my wife what is what? NO, not at all. Let me tell you something about my wife - if I said fix something else, that is exactly what she would do! But at the risk of sounding proud or arrogant, I think it is more Christ-like to submit to her here. I am to love her as Christ loved the church.

Did Jesus come insisting on his own way? He was tired and people came to Him anyway. Rather than turning them away, Jesus submitted to their needs. With His own disciples, Jesus washed their feet. At His death, He did not demand an easier method of execution. No, He valued each individual person. If Karen is to have any value, I have to allow her some measure of autonomy! Jesus did not sit around giving orders! Many men who want their wives to submit would do well to look at Jesus! Mutual submission is NOT a dirty word - it is a biblical concept at the heart of happy homes!

Notice next **the roles of marriage - the practicality of mutual submission**. These roles are God's design for the principle of mutual submission being worked out practically. Verses 22-27 say, "*Wives, submit to your husbands as 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. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*"

This passage is designed for us to see what OUR role should be, not to berate our mate with how we think they should be living. An age-old mistake that most people make is trying to change the "OTHER" person! I read about the husband who was reading Proverbs 31 in his devotions. He became frustrated with his own wife who did not measure up to the "super-wife" model described in that Proverb so he stomped off to set her straight. He plopped his Bible down in front of her and pointed. "Have you read this?" "I know about it," she said. "If you knew about this section . . ." "I said I know about it," she said interrupting him. Becoming firm he said, "if you know about it why don't you get up every morning and make me a hot breakfast?" She said, "dear, if you want a hot meal, then light your cornflakes on fire!"

Our responsibility is NOT to change the other person. It is to fulfill our own God-given roles! When our best efforts go into changing the other person we reap the worst relationship results. We become like the wife who noticed the new neighbors across the street. She watched each evening as the husband came home. He always had flowers or a small gift. The wife would run to greet him. They would embrace, kiss and then walk in the house hand in hand. One night, after weeks of seeing this ritual, her husband came in from work. "Have you noticed our new neighbors?" she asked him. He dropped his briefcase, plopped in his easy chair and said "yeah." "But have you noticed what they DO?" she asked. "No," he answered. She proceeded to explain and then asked, "why don't you ever do that?" He looked at her with a puzzled look and said, "honey, I can't do that. I hardly know the woman!"

Very briefly, what are those roles? Husbands, you are to be the head. That means to provide leadership, which is done through love. Wives, you are to be the follower. Do not usurp his authority. You follow through honor and respect.

Psychologists today have identified the basic needs of men and women. The basic need of a man is to have respect, a feeling of importance. The basic need of a woman is for love, romance, intimacy. God knew that long before modern clinical psychology. Have you ever noticed that He commanded men to "love their wives" and women to "honor or respect their husbands?" If we would concentrate our efforts at fulfilling our own roles, we would find more success. We would find the happy home we often seek by trying to change the other! We are really covering up our own weaknesses and feelings of inadequacy when we point out the weaknesses and failings of others.

Providing loving leadership and granting honor and respect is NOT natural. Yet it is possible when we understand love to be a DECISION and not a FEELING! Words like "sacrifice," "commitment" and especially "submission" have become four letter words today! Yet these words express the core of what empowers us to have happy homes!

Let me share a story told by Gary Smalley that expresses both roles beautifully. It is a story about Kay and John from Tampa, FL. John was a successful businessman, and both were active church members. Yet John gave his all to his business. He had only emotional leftovers

for Kay and the children. Kay was about to leave! Amazingly, she was even counseled by her pastor and some Christian friends to leave! But she made the decision to stay and work on herself according to 1 Peter 3:1-6: *“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.”*

Kay was active in the ladies ministry of her church. She was planning to go to the leader's retreat. This ministry was her lifeline - these were the ladies who encouraged her and prayed with her when she was ready to throw in the towel. John had been noticing a change in Kay. He came home one day and saw the bags packed for the retreat. He decided to test her. “Where are you going?” he asked. After Kay reminded him of the leadership retreat for the ladies ministry he responded, “I've changed my mind. I don't want you going and furthermore I want you to give up your leadership position. I think you're spending too much time involved with this ministry and not enough time at home.”

To make a long story short, she was devastated, but she received good counsel from a wise pastor (unfortunately, not her own). “Kay,” he said, “your first responsibility is to seek the Lord, then your family and then a ministry.” Kay went home and told her husband that she would skip the retreat and drop out of her leadership position!

Gary Smalley, in his book, Love is a Decision, says, “Genuine love is honor put into action regardless of the cost.” It comes from a heart overflowing with love for God, freeing us to seek another's best interests. That is exactly what Kay was doing! That is the concept of submission at work! Now granted, there may be situations where the spouse is emotionally unhealthy. The principle of submission does NOT burden us with the responsibility to give a blanket “yes” to a spouse who asks you to do something illegal or immoral! But John had not asked Kay to do anything like that. And this was her chance to prove to him what was more important to her - her husband or her ministry.

Now I said this illustrated not only submission but Christ-like love as well. Here is the rest of the story. Through Kay's influence, John's life was redirected toward God. He gave a testimony at a conference that Kay had worn him out with her love. He often said she 1 Peter 3ed him back to the Lord. He changed so much that he became involved in the men's ministry at church. In fact, he even became involved as a leader. The time came for the men's leadership retreat and John was like a schoolboy going to camp. Kay dropped him off at the bus station and never said anything but thought about her retreat. The whole way home it continued to play on her mind. She went home and broke down. She was thankful for the change in her husband's life, but she was also hurt at being denied chance to go to her own leaders' retreat!

Just then the phone rang. It was John who had stopped at a truck stop and said he just had to call. His voice was choking with emotion as he said, “Kay, I've been thinking back to time when I told you that you couldn't go to a retreat. Could you forgive me for asking you to give up something I knew was really important to you? I'm so sorry I asked you to step down

from your leadership group. I never should have asked what I did, and I never will again. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?"

Marriage is NOT a contract - it's a covenant. Far too often we view our marriages as contracts that say you do your part and I will do mine. How we need to understand that they are covenants and our attitude should be even if you do not do your part I will do mine anyway! Rather than trying to change the other, we need simply to fulfill the role God has given us! Leave the rest up to God. If we want a happy home, it is imperative!

Notice finally **the rewards of marriage - the promise of mutual submission**. Verses 28-33 say, *"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*

Again we hear those two concepts - love and honor. But what if you have not been loving your wife? What if you have not been respecting your husband? There are some simple correctives: pray and ask God's forgiveness; then ask your spouse to forgive you; and finally, begin to walk the talk! Change takes time. Things do not get messed up overnight - neither do they get fixed that quick.

But when a marriage becomes healthy - when that home is happy - we see a marvelous reward! That reward is summed up, I believe, in verse 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."* Notice that there are three steps here: leaving; cleaving; and weaving. Most of us want the weaving (the oneness, the unity) but fail to leave or cleave! I can not tell you how many times I have seen this. But this IS the reward - the promise of mutual submission. We have a spouse to cleave to now - we can leave mamma and daddy! And together with the Lord, we can have a happy home.

I love my mother (and my father when he was alive). They were a great source of counsel and compassion. But far more rewarding is the oneness God has allowed me to experience with my wife, Karen. God has been, continues, and will continue to weave us into that one flesh He speaks of. Have you ever noticed a braid? It appears to contain only two strands of hair. But it is impossible to have a braid with only two strands of hair. It would quickly unravel. Instead, it requires a third strand. The third strand, though not immediately evident, keeps the strands tightly woven. In a marriage, God's presence, like the third strand in a braid, holds husband and wife together.

At a three day retreat for pastors and their wives, one session consisted of testimonies about how the Lord had blessed the lives and ministries of those present. One young preacher's wife stood up and began nervously, The Bible promises, 'No good thing does the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Well, she said sincerely, my husband is one of those 'no good things'!

Unfortunately, many look at their family as "no good things!" Just something else to change or to correct. Instead, folks, we need to be looking in the mirror! Are we fulfilling the role God has given us? Women, do you honor and respect your husbands, regardless of what they do? Men, do you love your wives as Christ loved the church regardless of their response

to you? Those are our mandates. We will be accountable to no one other than God. The first key to a happy home is for each us to fulfill these mandates in our own life.