

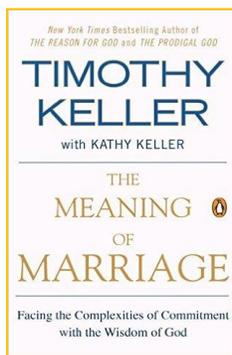
ROLES: Loving through Mutual Submission

January-February Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
January 21, 2018

TEXT: Ephesians 5:15-33



We continue in our series this January on the *Meaning of Marriage*. We've looked throughout at this key passage in Ephesians 5. This morning, we look at the topic of *ROLES: Loving Each Other through Mutual Submission*. The topic of gender, gender roles, and gender identity is contentious; it is controversial today. For many, the very language of headship or submission seems outmoded or even dangerous, seems to present ideas that pose a threat to our sense of self. Yet, when we look at the Scripture and we understand that Jesus is the model for both of these, they can be life-giving descriptions for a flourishing marriage. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, defines and models authority as sacrificial, self-giving love, and husbands are called to emulate this it and follow Christ as servant leaders for those around them. Jesus defines and models submission as sacrificial, self-giving obedience to the Father, and wives are called to emulate



Christ in this way as strong helpers for those around them. We are reading throughout this January this book by Tim and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*. I keep plugging it because I know there are people new to Kenwood every Sunday, and I want to encourage you to read this. This is a rich and deep source of conversation and reflection. It's challenging and yet encouraging. So, if you haven't taken the plunge, just go to Amazon and order a copy. This book was born out of a set of sermons preached in New York City, and it was born out of a long-lasting marriage. It was also born out of a reality that Tim and Kathy can see that they found marriage to be harder than they thought

it would be. I love that Eiro and Chisato just gave beautiful evidence of that. It's harder than you expected it to be, and Tim and Kathy also say that they wanted to give a brutally realistic and yet glorious vision, because this is God's design. You know, the best and greatest things in our lives often are difficult, aren't they? Then you break through that, press through that difficulty into God's future or into claiming the redemption that is offered for us in Christ. We have problems around the topic of marriage, problems around gender in our society, and these are not new actually. These are problems that Paul addressed in the city of Ephesus, a very urban setting. When he wrote Ephesians toward the end of his ministry, he was addressing a society that had many of the same features that we have. The divorce rate in the first century was almost identical to ours today, so there were big problems of husbands and wives. Yet, as he writes this letter, there's a challenge at the beginning that we constantly need to be reminded of, and that is that there is an unwise way of living. He writes in Ephesians 5:15-16:

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

In other words, the environment around you will not be a good source for learning to walk in God's ways. In Ephesians 5:17, he says:

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

We need to learn it, and part of growing in our married lives, or even growing as we approach it, or growing as we reflect upon it depending on our stage and station in life, is to be saturated in God's will. It's so encouraging, isn't it? We all feel that when someone says, “We're celebrating our 28th year,” or when someone says, “We're celebrating our 65th year of being married.” This church is filled with husbands and wives who model before us how to love each other as we age. Pay close attention to this as it is very powerful. Ephesians 5:18 says:

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”

We need the power of the Holy Spirit to live as God is calling us to live.

These are positive summons, but they are also an invitation to turn away from misconceptions, and our culture abounds with those. We are confused in our society about gender. Some say that gender is just a social construct and that there is no meaningful difference between men and women. The current approved restroom sign is an oblique testimony to this. These restrooms have signs on them where you can see this is for women, for men, or for 'half-and-half,' whatever you identify with. It is a social construct, and yet the Scripture invites us to see that God is our Creator and that He creates male and female for a purpose. It's not a social construct. Some of us, when we think of the topic of gender, are filled with emotions. Some of us are intimidated



by perceived expectations of what should be the outcome of our gender. Others feel frustrated by the challenge of being in relationship with someone of an opposite gender, and we are aware of those differences and challenges. Some of us are hurt or angry by the experience of that frustration, and yet I want us to consider that the Scripture desires for us to see that maybe our sinfulness explains the weakness or the pain that is caused by the expression of our gender rather than gender itself. When we think of the topic of defined roles, some of us think that implies oppression, and the word submission in particular is a negative word for many. For others, the word authority is a negative word, and yet the Scripture again invites us in our passage to see that the redemption we have in Christ redefines our roles and is both hard and beautiful.

Last Sunday, we shared from Ephesians 5:31, which is a quote from Genesis 2, the biblical vision of a husband and wife together—that a man would leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two become one flesh. We argued from Scripture that this language describes a covenant bond, and that a covenant is an elected relationship of obligation under oath, that this relationship of marriage is a covenant. It is a covenant that is promised. It is a love that is committed, and it is a love that is exclusive between these two, and the oath is promised in God's sight. Genesis 2 assumes the narrative of Genesis 1, and that's where we need to begin briefly this morning. When we think about husbands and wives, male and female, we need to begin with the first chapter of the Scriptures. In Genesis 1, God creates humanity. In Genesis 1:27 we read:

“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

So gender is God's idea. It's not an accident; it's not a mistake; it's not a social construct. It's there at the beginning, and it's an expression of God's creative activity. Notice that it's not just for functional purposes either. Male and female are described in the image of God; they are of equal worth, equal value, equal significance. Both male and female are necessary to reflect the knowledge of God. Both receive the creation commandment to fill the earth with His praise and to reflect God's righteous dominion. There is not a higher view of humanity in the ancient world. There is not a higher view of male and female as of equal worth of persons in any other text or any other governmental decree. The highest view of our person comes from the Scripture, and it's given to both men and women. The narrative of Genesis 2 takes us in closer to the creation of humanity in more detail, and the recurring refrain of Genesis 1 is God looking at His creation and seeing that it is good. Seven times He looks out at what He has made and says, “It's good; it's good; it's good,” and yet Genesis 2:18 comes to us with a startling statement:

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a

helper fit for him.”

This is the first ‘not good’ of the Bible. The first thing that's wrong in the universe is man is alone, and the Lord says: “That's not good. I'm going to made him a helper fit for him,” is the ESV translation. This last phrase, *a helper fit for him*, is rendered differently in different English translations. Let's look at each part. It is a very significant phrase for us to understand the relationship of husbands and wives. The King James says: “I will make a help meet for him”; the New American Standard, the NIV, and other versions retain this word *helper*.

When we think of the word *helper* in English, sometimes we think of someone in a derogatory sense. Sometimes we imagine that *helper* connotes merely assisting someone who could do the task almost as well without help. But, that's not the biblical image here. The Hebrew noun is *ezer*, and we get the name *Ebenezer*, the stone of help. God is the one who is most often referred to as the “Helper.” In Scripture, the helper is one who comes alongside to bring aid, someone who makes up what is lacking with their strength. It often is used to describe military help, without which a battle would be lost. To help someone in Scripture makes up what is lacking by providing the strength that you bring to that moment. It's a very positive image. The last phrase, “a helper,” is rendered in very different ways: In the King James, *meet for him*; others say, *suitable for him*; the New Revised Standard says, *as his partner*; Young's Literal Translation says, *as his counterpart*. The phrase that's used here to describe Eve as Adam's wife is literally that she is *as opposite to him*. That sounds like a contradiction. She is both like him and she is unlike him, and yet she corresponds to him as his counterpart. I love that description, that translation. She is created corresponding to him, unlike the animals. She is like him, and yet she is different. We need both of these categories. When we look at our spouses, we need to say: “You are like me. We are the same in all the ways it really matters, and get we are different, and those differences matter and are not a negative thing.

I wholeheartedly recommend marrying an Old Testament scholar, if you can find one. I have been trying to apply the sermon our own family life, so Christine and I have been talking about this passage, talking about the book together this January. I said, “Tell me your thoughts on that Eve is made from Adam's rib.” She said, “Well, you know, that language is used of the tabernacle.” I thought, “Of course.” You know, in our house all roads flow out of the Exodus and stop at the tabernacle. I asked her to tell me more about that. She said, “That's the very same term, *rib* or *side*, that is used to describe architecturally the corresponding half of the sanctuary. If you don't have the other side, then the tabernacle falls over. It's the same word that's used a couple of times in Genesis, but the overwhelming usage of this word is in the sanctuary, that this is the corresponding side that fits together so the House of God stands up as a place of His presence.” The rest of us are sitting around the table with our jaws dropping. I finally said, “Why have I never heard this before?” What a beautiful image! Then again, it is just

People's Exhibit C of why it's good to marry an Old Testament scholar. What a beautiful picture of correspondence of oneness, togetherness, so that there is a sanctuary, a place of God's presence. Eve is not made out of Adam's head. She is not made from his foot, but the image is side-by-side closely bound together and the climax of the description is leaving father and mother and holding fast. It is not a meaning of clinging dependency. Some translations render it *cleave*, but it just means holding together. It is an architectural image—built together like a house, a familial bond of kinship, of oneness, of shared imaging of God. It is a beautiful picture of equal worth. There is no culture, no society, that has a theological basis for the equality of men and women like what we have from Scripture. That's one of the reasons wherever Christianity has spread in the world, the rights of women have increased. This oneness is radically disrupted and marred by the fall of humanity in Genesis 3. Adam is conspicuously absent and leaves Eve to face the Dragon alone. Eve is deceived by the false promises of the Dragon and eats and disobeys God and gives to her husband. We see the catastrophic change in the unity between man and woman. The air is filled now with blame-shifting, finger-pointing, and accusation, and rather than the oneness becoming a source of completion and unity, it becomes an occasion for oppression and exploitation. The problems that we have in married life are a result of our fallenness, not a consequence of our gender, and that's crucial.

So, as we come back to this passage in Ephesians 5, Paul is inviting us to live out a redemption and restoration in Christ, where the new creation is on display in a broken world. This is possible only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit: *Be filled with the Spirit*. This new creation life starts to flow out. As we said in the first week of our series, it flows out and our speech patterns change, our fundamental attitude changes towards one another, and the posture toward one another in Ephesians 5:21 is of submitting to one another, of preferring the other. We began by the challenge to consider our own self-centeredness as the greatest problem in our marriage. This submitting to one another, this preferring one another, is given practical expression specifically to wives and to husbands. Let's look at this together.

In Ephesians 5:22, Paul writes that wives, literally, *to your own husbands*. The verb *submit* is carried forward from verse 21 where it is given to both of us, and the specific challenge for wives within marriage is in that little expression, *to your own husband*. That's the challenge. The hardest thing may not be submitting in the abstract. The hardest thing might just be committing yourself to this guy with his flaws and failures. *To your own husband* is the fronted expression for Paul. It proposes the challenge of an exclusive bond, a promised loyalty and faithfulness, not to all men in general. If everyone is invited to the party, then no one is. If everyone is saved, no one is. If you're married to everyone then you are really married to no one. To your own husband, not to all men in general, but the challenge for wives is to commit themselves, to entrust themselves, to this guy, this man whom Christ has commanded to care

for me. It means that you can't pursue getting your emotional needs met elsewhere. It means that you can't pursue getting what you need from your girlfriends. It means that this guy with his foibles and failures, with his steep incline growth curve, with his sanctification path that seems to be flipping over backwards, you have got to be committed to this guy. For some, *submit* sounds like a terrifying statement, or by definition oppressive, but remember, we can never lose sight of the fact that this is a call to imitate Christ. Jesus elevates and underlines the equality of women as coheirs of the image. He redeems the role given to man and woman at the beginning by inhabiting them both as servant leader, servant head, and ezer subordinate. Kathy Keller writes:

“If it was not an assault on the dignity and divinity of the Second Person of the Godhead to submit himself, and assume the role of a servant, then how could it possibly injure me to be asked to play out the ‘Jesus role’ in my marriage?” (175).

Those are wise words.

“Wives submit to your husbands **as to the Lord.**” The husband is described as the head, but he is described as the head of a body, and there is the oneness. The husband is invited to emulate Christ’s behavior, His posture, His practice, and His affection as Savior, protector, benefactor, and as the church submits to Christ, wives to their husbands. So, the new creation is on display. It is very important to notice that in Ephesians 5:24, the form of the verb, in wives should *submit*, is what grammarians call the middle voice. We are familiar with active verbs: I hit the ball. That’s active. Passive verbs: I was hit by the ball. Middle verbs are this remarkable feature of the Greek language where you both do the action and receive it. Submission is not a duty that is coerced, but it is a gift that is offered. It is when a wife looks at her husband and says, “I’m going to seek to be a strong helper, side-by-side you. I will support your interest. I am going to further the glorious Christ-likeness that God is working in you. I will defend your reputation; I am going to seek your good. I will advance your cause; I will invite and receive your care. I will respond to your initiative so that together God’s great purpose may be realized in the world through our life together. It means building up, not tearing down; it means standing with, alongside, not against. Together, oneness, walking side-by-side, is the imagery.

I remember when we first got married. We were graduate students so we didn’t have to rush back. We had the planned portion of our honeymoon, and we went to Italy; and then we had the semi-planned portion of the honeymoon, and we went to Greece to see her family, and that worked out just fine. (Most people don’t spend their honeymoon with their in-laws, but we did, a portion of it.) Then we had the unplanned portion in Turkey. We were walking through Ephesus. It was a different setting, and there were unknowns. I remember thinking, “I’m a new husband. What’s my role here? We are in a foreign country. There could be Turkish bandits

around every corner.” I thought, “I will walk in front. I’ll take the bullet. I’ll take the sword,” and so I was walking about 20 feet in front of my new bride. She tolerated it for maybe a day and a half. I was thinking “I’m doing this. I mean, any danger will be solved by me, and so my wife will just walk behind me in the path of security and safety and be so impressed with me,” and I was thinking that I was aggregating goodwill by the day, by the hour. Then, finally, she gently pulled me aside and said, “You know, I think we got married so we could walk together.” Here I thought she would have been so impressed. So I learned that the image is walking together, side-by-side, but that togetherness is expressed in this way, in a godly way, by our wives. Is this a negative image? No! Is it easy? Hardly.

Let’s look more closely at how the new creation is on display in husbands. Six times in the paragraph for husbands is the word *love*. Six times husbands are told to love their wives. Husbands need this word. The opposite is to be unloving, and you can be unloving in an active way. You can be uncaring, you can be dismissive; you can be unloving in a passive way which is neglect, lack of attention. We are challenged here, husbands, six times love our wives **as Christ**. Again, just as wives are called to imitate Christ, so husbands are called to imitate Christ, to love their wives in the very manner that Christ loved the church. It’s a sacrificial, saving death that makes us holy. It’s a love that does not leave us unchanged, but is powerful enough to change us. It’s a love that sanctifies us. It’s a love that is expressed verbally: the washing of water with the Word. It’s a love that seeks our ultimate beauty in Ephesians 5:27: “. . . that the church might be presented in splendor.” In Ephesians 5:28, we read:

“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

They are to love their wives as their own self, not to see their spouse as someone separate, but intimately connected, modeling the oneness in the Garden of Eden. Paul challenges us as husbands in this passage to seek to be a servant leader, one that nourishes, cherishes, and cares for the body, and to be a servant leader who pursues the interest of our wives, who furthers her glorious Christ-likeness in the making, who defends her reputation, who seeks her good, who advances her cause, who invites and receives her care, who is attentive in response to her needs so that together God’s great purposes are realized in the world. Is being a servant leader a negative image? No! Is it easy? Hardly! How do we really do this? I want to apply this glorious imagery together in three ways, besides reading the book and talking about.

There are three things that the text challenges us.

Number one is to ***embrace the other***. Jim and Kathy write:

“Inside a real marriage there will be conflicts rooted in gender differences that are seismic. It is not simply that the other gender is different; it’s that his or her differences *make no sense*.”

And once we come up against this wall of incomprehensibility, the sin in our heart tends to respond by assigning moral significance to what is simply a deep temperamental difference.”

That’s what happens. You see the difference; you don’t understand the difference; it doesn’t make sense; and then the sin in you says, “There’s moral significance to that difference.”

“Men see women’s need for ‘interdependence’ as sheer *dependence*, and women see men’s need for ‘independence’ as pure *ego*. Husbands and wives grow distant from one another because they allow themselves to engage in a constant, daily drumbeat of thoughts of inner disdain for the gendered difference of their spouse. But Jesus gives both a pattern and a power to change all of this” (183).

Men and women really are different, and I don't mean just in the really obvious ways. I remember Dr. John Patrick’s telling me that he could tell if you look at an eyeball under a microscope if it was a man's eyeball or woman's eyeball. I was like: “Really? Tell me a little bit more about that.” He said:

“They are built differently; they are structured differently. Women biologically have greater capacity to see a wider range of color. They can perceive different colors and different spectrums of color and saturation, color intensity. Women anatomically have better peripheral vision than men. Try it when you're driving. You will often noticed that a wife will see danger coming in from the side before the husband because their eyeballs are different.”

I should have thought of it at the time, but I wanted to say, “That's why I should be grateful every time a passenger says, ‘Hey, watch out for that!’” Our first reaction is to say, “I saw that!” but maybe you didn't.

As we were getting ready to get married, my wife was asking the question: “What's the real significance of being married? Why marriage? Marriage is an eternal state. Why get married?” One of the insights the Lord gave her is connected to this very point. She said, “You know, we will see more together. You will see things I'll never see, and I will see things that you will never see, and together, our vision will be broader, and we will see more of the Lord.” So, rather than get frustrated by those differences, embrace the other.

Number two is to *ask God to forgive you for where you have been confused, angry, or fearful.*

I wrestled with how to word this, but I left it this way—to ask God to forgive you, because all sin is against God in the end. Within that also has to be to ask your spouse to forgive where you have been confused, angry, or fearful. It's amazing how the Bible does not give a detailed catalog of specific behaviors. In a traditional culture, like in Greece where my wife grew up, when you gather at the table, you honor the men by serving them first. To this day, when my in-laws are in our house, the native language of our home shifts to Greek and the Greek culture takes over, so the men get to eat first. Yet, in our society and in my culture, to serve the women

and children first is the way of showing honor at the table. So when we are all together, it's a little like a big battle: who is going to get the plate first? But the battle is actually a beautiful expression of how will we outdo one another in showing honor? Ask God to forgive where we have been confused, angry, or fearful, and call forth the best in each other.

Number three gives us the questions of the week. Inside the security and the safety created by the biblical vision of husbands and wives, I have a question for each of us. The question I want wives to ask their husbands this week, with sincerity, without qualification, is: ***How can I better help and support you?*** Then have the courage and patience to listen. Husbands, here's my question for you. Look at your wives and ask without qualification and with full sincerity: ***How can I better love and care for you?*** These are really two sides of the same coin, aren't they? It is not the case that husbands don't need wives, don't need love from their wives, just as wives need love from their husbands. Each of us needs mutual support, but it is according to God's Word. It will unlock something deep within us, something that God has woven in when a wife can say with full sincerity, "How can I better help and support you?" This can be transformative and life-giving. It can be transformative and life-giving when a husband, without qualification or attendant circumstances, says with full sincerity, "How can I better love and care for you?" Within the security of the covenant, we can exercise the freedom to ask these questions, and we can pray that God would help us to live out servant-leadership and sacrificial support in a way that puts God's new creation on display in a broken world. This is not something that happens overnight, but, by God's design, over a lifetime. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we give You praise, and we are humbled, Lord, by Your goodness in Your design. Lord, we ask You to forgive us this morning for where we have lived as unwise or unintelligent, where we have put ourselves on display. Lord Jesus, we pray that You would help us, that You would renew us on the inside that the gospel of grace would flood our hearts in such a way that we would be secure enough in Christ to embrace the otherness of our spouse, that we would be secure enough in Christ, knowing that we have been forgiven by Him, that we can ask our spouse to forgive. Give us, Lord, the overflow of grace and that confidence to ask these questions that unlock the soul of our spouse: How can I better help and support you? How can I better love and care for you? Lord, we pray that this would be a congregation where marriage is supported and encouraged and that the new creation that You designed is on display. Lord, we cannot do this without your Holy Spirit. I want to invite you to stand and just put your hands open. We are going to sing this closing song, asking the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into our willing souls. Make that your prayer as we sing. Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me and renew me. Cause Your Word to come alive in me, and Lord, may this be so, we ask for the fame of Jesus' Name. Amen.