

January 27th, 2008 “Why We Must Follow the Commandments”

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

Ephesians 5:22, 25

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last discussion on this topic, we consistently, insistently, and persistently focused on a question pertaining to the interpretation of the passages of Scripture that we have as our text. The question had to do with the timing, the sequence, and the priority of how these passages of Scripture should be applied in our marriages. Should a wife submit to her husband before she is sure that her husband will treat her in an understanding, compassionate, tenderhearted, courteous, loving manner?

Most of the adults in this room have lived through the Civil Rights movements and the Women’s Liberation movement, a time in which equality, freedom and liberation from oppression has been the social focus of our society. Based upon our upbringing, we know of no nobler political statement than that we live in one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

However, if we operate from the context of the absolute personal liberty that the Constitution promises, **Ephesians 5:22-24** seems to be an anachronism, something that takes women back to the days of inequality. Could the Bible actually mean that which it says?

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

In the light of the strides that we have made towards racial equality, we ask ourselves, “Did God actually intend for such a statement to be part of His Word?” In the light of the strides that we have made towards gender equality, we ask ourselves, “Did God actually intend for such a statement to be part of His Word?”

Paul, the author of **Ephesians 5:22-24**, also tells us in **Titus 2:1-5** which says:

1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:

2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;
3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—
4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,
5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Since we find the teaching of the Apostle Paul to be redundant on these issues, let us go to Peter, who tells us, in **1Peter 3:1-8**:

1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,
2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.
3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—
4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.
5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,
6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.
7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;
9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Peter and Paul, the two pillars of the New Testament Church, have consistent instructions on this issue. Church doctrine teaches that this consistency is because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. **2Timothy 3:16-17** says:

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God Himself is the author of Scripture, and His inspiration makes the Scripture consistent, so that we can develop coherent doctrines from His Word. I think that we have quoted enough Scripture to sufficiently develop the doctrine that God commands wives to obey their husbands and husbands to love their wives.

However, the question that came from our last discussion on this subject is: should a wife submit to her husband before she is sure that her husband will treat her in an understanding, compassionate, tenderhearted, courteous, loving manner?

The first logical point, when considering this question, is that the determination of the husband's obedience to the commandment to love his wife should be made before the marriage begins. Keep in mind that no one in our community can be coerced into marriage. Listen to the words of the traditional wedding ceremony.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honorable state of being, instituted by God, signifying to us the mystical union that is between Christ and his church: which holy state of being Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy state of being these two persons present come now to be joined. If anyone can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

As a minister, I am charged with the responsibility of asking each couple that I marry whether they are entering into marriage reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. What does this mean?

Have you reverently prayed and sought the will of God for this marriage?

Have you discreetly investigated the bona fides of your intended spouse to ascertain that you know the character of the person whom you are marrying?

Have you been advised by someone with sufficient experience and knowledge to ascertain that your spouse to be is an objectively suitable person?

Are you entering this marriage after a sober, objective evaluation of yourself and your intended spouse?

Do you understand the terms of marriage to which God will hold you responsible?

Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 19:4-6, 9**:

4 And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’

5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ ?

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

Marriage is intended by God to be a permanent relationship, broken only by the sin of adultery. Divorce and remarriage are defined by God, in verse **9** of **Matthew 19**, as adultery. I know that this definition conflicts with our civil laws, but there is no civil jurisdiction in Christ’s Kingdom.

So, the question, for those entering into marriage, is: have you done your due diligence, and have you intelligently evaluated the situation into which you are entering? How well do you know this person and how sure are you that they will follow the commandments of God concerning marriage? Since the Scripture commands a wife’s obedience to her husband, I am led to the conclusion that the time for evaluating whether or not the person that you marry loves you is before the marriage.

As a part of the wedding ceremony, the father of the bride, or some other sufficiently close male relative, has the responsibility to giving the bride to the groom. In our time, this is

generally considered to be just a formality, but the real purpose of this part of the ceremony is to make sure that the bride has received the blessing of her father, the man who ostensibly has her best interests at heart, and has take the time to ascertain that the man whom the bride is marrying meets their specifications for a husband.

If brides and their families took the eighteen months to two years necessary to evaluate the groom properly and then made a marital decision after an objective evaluation, it would be less likely that the question of the groom's love would be an issue.

However, in our culture, the decision to marry may not be based upon an objective evaluation of suitability, but on an emotional evaluation of euphoria. The question asked before marriage may not be "is this person suitable as a spouse?", but "does this person make me feel as though I am in love?"

A counselor's secretary announced that a client had come to the office that needed to speak to the counselor immediately. The counselor told the secretary to show the client in, fully expecting to see her burst into tears and tell some tragic story as soon as the door was closed. Instead, the client virtually skipped into the office, beaming with excitement.

"How are you today, Janice?" asked the counselor.

"Great!" she said. "I've never been better in my life. I'm getting married!"

"You are?" the surprised counselor said. "To whom and when?"

"To David Gillespie," she exclaimed, "in September."

"That's exciting. How long have you been dating?"

"Three weeks. I know it's crazy, after all the people I have dated and the number of times I came so close to getting married. I can't believe it myself, but I know David is the one for me. From the first date, we both knew it. Of course, we didn't talk about it on the first night, but one week later, he asked me to marry him. I knew he was going to ask me, and I knew I was going to say yes. I have never felt this way before. You know about the relationships that I have had through the years and the struggles I have had. In every relationship, something was not right. I never felt at peace about marrying any of them, but I know that David is the right one."

By this time, Janice was rocking back and forth in her chair, giggling and saying, "I know it's crazy, but I am so happy. I have never been this happy in my life."

Janice has fallen in love. In her mind, David is the most wonderful man she has ever met. He is perfect in every way. He will make the ideal husband. She thinks about him day and night. The facts that David has been married twice before, has three children, and has had three jobs in the past year are trivial to Janice. She's happy, and she is convinced that she is going to be happy forever with David. She is in love.

How do we fall in love?

We meet someone whose physical characteristics and personality traits create enough electrical shock to trigger our "love alert" system. The bells go off, and we set in motion the process of getting to know the person. The first step may be sharing a meal, but our real interest is not in the food. We are on a quest to discover love. "Could this warm, tingly feeling I have inside be the 'real' thing?"

Sometimes we lose the tingles on the first date. Other times, however, the tingles are stronger after the first date than before. We arrange for a few more “together” experiences, and before long the level of intensity has increased to the point where we find ourselves saying, “I think I’m falling in love.” Eventually we are convinced that it is the “real thing,” and we tell the other person, hoping the feeling is reciprocal. If it isn’t, things cool off a bit or we redouble our efforts to impress, and eventually win the love of, our beloved.

When it is reciprocal, we start talking about marriage because “everyone” agrees that being “in love” is the necessary foundation for a good marriage.

The person who is “in love” has the illusion that his beloved is perfect. His mother can see the flaws but he can’t. His mother says, “Darling, have you considered she has been under psychiatric care for five years?” But he replies, “Oh, Mother, give me a break. She’s been out for three months now.” His friends also can see the flaws but are not likely to tell him unless he asks, and chances are he won’t because in his mind she is perfect and what others think doesn’t matter.

Unfortunately, the “in love” experience is not a permanent one. Psychologist Dr. Dorothy Tennov has coined the term “limerance” to describe the experience of being in this highly charged emotional state, distinguishing limerance, the “in love” state, from a more mature love, one in which the people have done the type of due diligence of which I spoke in describing the foundation for marriage. After studying the anecdotal evidence of over 500 individuals, Dr. Tennov’s research concluded that the average life span of the romantic obsession that she calls “limerance” is two years.

Some of the attributes of “limerance” are as follows:

- Constant thinking about the limerent person.
- Vivid imagination that some action by the limerent person means that the feelings are reciprocated.
- Acute sensitivity to any act, thought, or condition that can be interpreted favorably, and an extraordinary ability to devise or invent “reasonable” explanations for why neutral actions are a sign of hidden passion in the limerent object.
- A general intensity of feeling that leaves other concerns in the background.

Once the limerance wears off, your ability to emphasize that which is admirable to the exclusion to that which is negative goes away as well. Your beloved spouse is no longer perfect, but becomes a human being, with all of the faults and foibles of any other human being.

Remember **Romans 3:23**, which tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

While “limerance” is largely emotionally driven, and may even be irrational to some degree, Biblical love, the product of the spiritual growth of a person in a Biblically based marriage, is defined as a set of character based actions. **1Corinthians 13:4-8** describes:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails.

A person exhibiting Biblical love has decided to be patient with, kind to, not envious of, not rude with, and not easily angered by, the object of their affection. Biblical love understands that the nature of a mature love relationship requires perseverance.

When you come to the conclusion that your decision to marry was based upon limerance rather than love, it is quite possible that you would feel that you are entitled to a “do over” once the limerance that motivated your marriage wears off.

Thus, our current question. If we married without fully using our rational ability to discern the qualities of our spouse, and, after a couple of years, the limerance has faded and we finally have a more realistic perception of the person that we married, are we liable for the vows that we made in an emotional rather than a rational state? Should the person that we married have to prove himself once again since we were not looking at him rationally when we married him?

In our civil jurisdiction, we have no-fault divorce laws. People emerging from a state of limerance often want a do-over. However, the Bible does not allow for a do-over, nor does it allow for disobedience to the Biblical terms of marriage because of a change of feelings.

The reason that God commands us to act with love toward the one that we have married is that we can only have the happy marriage that we want should we choose to override our feelings and act based upon our commitments. You cannot improve your marital situation by failing to act according to your pledge to love your spouse. Listen to your vows:

I take you to be my wedded spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge you my faith.

I hope that you can see the basis for the “for better or worse” part of the marriage vow. You should also understand that God anticipates that the “for worse” part is coming. **Matthew 24:10** tells us:

10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

We live in a world of sin. We are all sinners. It is not reasonable to withhold love from our spouse until he or she is perfect. If we waited for perfection, no one would ever be able to stay married. The process that leads the two to become one is described in **2Peter 3:18**, which says:

18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Your husband or wife is not perfect, but neither are you. God commands us to grow together. We can only do so by following the marital commandments that God gives us, and to have faith and trust that He is navigating the circumstances of our lives, and will gather us together under the authority of His Word.

I listened to the testimony of a brother in this town that liked to drink and party. He married a Christian young woman, because he wanted a good mother for his children, someone who would be home with them while he was out at the party. They had six children, as I remember, and during the years that his children were growing up, he spent his weekends out at the party while his wife faithfully brought the children to church.

He told me that he came in one Sunday morning from being out all night. As he came through the door, his wife was in the kitchen cooking breakfast, and his children, now grown, were there with her. She had anticipated his arrival, and had breakfast ready for him. She and his children greeted him, and, although he had just come in from a night of partying, they sat, ate and talked, and had a wonderful breakfast together.

She and his children then left for church, while he started upstairs to get some sleep. But, as he told me, he couldn't sleep. He wondered within himself why she and the children would treat him so well when he had virtually abandoned them for the party life. Why they would take the time, on their way to church, to give him such a pleasant morning, when he had been out all night.

He decided to get up and go to the church to see what was going on there that made his wife and children treated him the way that they did. He found them and sat with them while the pastor talked about how Jesus died on the Cross so that our sins could be forgiven. He had heard the story of Jesus many times, but this time, it finally sank in. The story of Jesus is a story of forgiveness.

When the preacher opened the doors of the church, the man decided that he had spent enough time forsaking his family, partying and doing things that he ought not do. The man realized that he had a better time sitting in the kitchen that morning with his wife and children than he had had at the party. The man recognized that he was better off with the love that his wife and children showed him, which came from their understanding of the forgiveness that Jesus Christ gave us in his sacrifice on the Cross.

He decided, that Sunday morning after breakfast, that he had been on the wrong track, and that he should take the opportunity that the preacher was giving him to align himself with Jesus Christ.

So he joined the church, and decided to turn over a new leaf. He did so.

A couple of years later, he had a stroke. He lasted a while after that, and then he died. He was saved because his wife decided to keep her vows, regardless of the fact that he was not a perfect husband.

No, you can't suspend or forsake your vows because you are not happy with your spouse. That is not part of the deal.

Jesus Christ was not happy on the way to the Cross. As Jesus was being lied on by the scribes and Pharisees, He was not happy about the situation. As Jesus was being beaten almost to death by the Roman soldiers in the basement of the Fortress Antonia, He was not happy about the situation. As Jesus carried the Old Rugged Cross up Calvary's hill, He was not happy about the situation. As the Roman Soldiers drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet, He was not happy about the situation. As God turned out the sun so that He could pour down the punishment that you and I are owed for the sins that we have committed upon Jesus, He was not happy about the situation. During all of the cruelty, all of the pain, all of the agony, all of the suffering, Jesus

was not happy about the situation. He cried and sweated blood in Gethsemane just anticipating it. Jesus was not happy about the situation.

But Jesus persevered. Compare your complaints about the way that your spouse treats you to the way that they treated Jesus. But why did Jesus persevere? Well, why did that wife treat her husband so well after he stayed out all night. Both Jesus and the wife endured the pain that was inflicted upon them because that is how people are changed.

The suffering of Jesus changed the apostles from a band of cowards to the greatest preachers in world history, all of whom died preaching of Jesus Christ, whom they had previously forsaken.

The suffering of the apostles eventually changed Roman worship from pagan, idol worship into the Roman Catholic Church.

The suffering of spouses, much like the lady who persevered through her many years of suffering a lack of companionship from her spouse, bring spouses to the Lord and helps them to grow spiritually.

No, you can't wait to start obeying your husband until you are sure that he loves you. No, you can't wait to start showing love to your wife until you are sure that she is going to obey you. You can't wait for your spouse to become perfect before you decide to obey God any more than Jesus could wait for us to become perfect before He decided to die on the Cross for us. Like Jesus, you have to make the sacrifice first, before your marriage can rise from the dead. In fact, it may be that your marriage can only rise from the dead if you choose to make the sacrifice to follow the commandment that God has given us, regardless of how you feel about doing so.

The Biblical story of Naaman the Syrian is most instructive. Listen to **2Kings 5:1-14**:
1 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.

2 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife.

3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."

4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel."

5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

8 So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean."

11 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'

12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Had it not been for his servants, Naaman would have missed his blessing because of his pride. Naaman wanted the man of God to make some type of fuss over him, but the man of God simply gave Naaman the instructions that would fix his trouble, and the choice as to whether or not to obey.

I hope you see my point.

God is telling you ladies that there is a blessing for you should you choose to obey Him by obeying your husband. Maybe you can't see it, but remember that Naaman couldn't see the wisdom of dipping in the Jordan seven times.

God is telling us brothers that there is a blessing for us should we choose to treat our wives with love. Maybe our wives don't deserve it, but remember that Naaman wasn't healed because he was worthy, he was healed because he chose to obey the man of God.

Let us, today, choose to obey the word of God. **Ephesians 5:22, 25** says:

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Obey your husband, and love your wife.

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis
Family Life Baptist Church