

# FAMILY

## The Way for a Wife

November 12, 2017

Ephesians 5:22-24

### **Wives and Husbands**

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

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## **2. The duty of wives (verses 22-24)**

Two reasons are given, or at least implied, for the wife's submission to her husband. The first is drawn from creation and concerns the husband's 'headship' of his wife, while the second is drawn from redemption and concerns Christ's 'headship' of the church.

*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife ... (verses 22-23a).* The husband's headship is both stated as a fact and made the ground of his wife's submission. But its origin is not elaborated here. For a fuller understanding of Paul's argument we need to turn elsewhere, especially to 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 and 1 Timothy 2:11-13. In both these passages he goes back to the narrative of Genesis 2 and points out that woman was made after man, out of man and for man. He adds that man is also born from woman, so that man and woman are dependent on one another. Nevertheless, his emphasis is on the order, mode and purpose of the creation of Eve. And since it is mainly on these facts of creation that Paul bases his case for the husband's headship, his argument has permanent and universal validity, and is not to be dismissed as culturally limited. The cultural elements of his teaching are to be found in the applications of the principle, in the requirement of 'veiling' certainly, and I think also in the requirement of 'silence'. But the man's (and especially the husband's) 'headship' is not a cultural application of a principle; it is the foundation principle itself. This is not chauvinism, but creationism. The new creation in Christ frees us from the distortion of relations between the sexes caused by the fall (*e.g.* Gn. 3:16), but it establishes the original intention of the creation. It was to this 'beginning' that Jesus himself went back (*e.g.* Mt. 19:4-6). He confirmed the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. So must we. What creation has established, no culture is able to destroy.

This is also why we should reject the facile argument that since slavery has been abolished, the wife's submission should by analogy be abolished too. If this were the case, then why not complete the trio and abolish a child's obedience as well? No, the parallels are inexact. Slavery is a dehumanizing institution, with no justification in any biblical doctrine. A husband's headship, however, is rooted in creation.

Turning from biblical revelation to contemporary experience, Christians will agree that our human sexuality is part and parcel of our humanness. Masculinity and femininity represent a profound distinction which is psychological as well as physiological. Of course the sexes are equal before God, but this does not mean that they are identical. God himself created man male and female in his likeness. So both equally bear his image, but each also complements the other. The biblical perspective is to hold simultaneously the equality and the complementarity of the sexes. 'Partnership' is a good word too, so long as it is remembered that the contribution which each brings to it is not identical but distinctive. Hence a man finds himself by being a man, and a woman finds herself by being a woman. Genuine self-discovery and self-fulfilment do not come from striving to be somebody else or from imitating the opposite sex.

What then are the complementary distinctives of the two sexes? The biblical teaching is that God has given to man (and specially to the husband in the marriage relationship) a certain headship, and that his wife will find herself and her true God-given role not in rebellion against him or his headship, but in a voluntary and joyful submission.

The modern understanding of sexual differentiation tends to confirm this biblical teaching. This at least is the thesis of the American sociologist Professor Steven Goldberg in his book *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. Although it is a conscious response to the feminist movement, he claims that his approach is scientific and not ideological, in that he rests his case on empirical evidence. Nor is his viewpoint to be dismissed as masculine, for the distinguished American anthropologist Dr Margaret Mead is quoted on the book's dust cover as supporting its thesis: 'All the claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed.'

The first part of his book is an anthropological study whose conclusion he expresses as follows: 'In every society that has ever existed one finds patriarchy (males fill the overwhelming percentage of upper hierarchical positions in political and all other hierarchies), male attainment (males attain the high-status roles, whatever these may be in any given society) and male dominance (both males and females feel that dominance in male-female encounters and relationships resides in the male, and social expectations and authority systems reflect this).' He is at pains to point out that he is neither making any value judgments, nor measuring performance, nor pronouncing either sex 'superior' or 'inferior' to the other; his purpose is simply to show that 'patriarchy', 'male dominance' and 'male attainment'—in the technical sense in which he employs these terms—are 'three universal realities', since 'in no society, anywhere or at any time, have these realities been

absent'.<sup>3</sup>

For the development of his second thesis Dr Goldberg moves from anthropology to physiology. He argues that the anthropological evidence for male dominance which he has marshalled has a physiological cause. The 'three universal realities' are the manifestation in society of a basic male drive (often called 'aggression', though Dr Goldberg prefers 'dominance tendency'), which is itself 'neuro-endocrinological' in origin. 'At its most basic, the hypothesis at the core of the theory presented here simply states that there are neuro-endocrinological differences between men and women that engender different male and female responses to the environment and, therefore, different male and female behaviour'. He is not denying that our genetic code interacts with our environment and upbringing, nor that there are individual exceptions to his generalization, nor that many women are frustrated because they lack opportunities to use their gifts. Instead, he is asserting that there are basic differences between masculinity and femininity, that masculinity means drive for dominance, and that 'dominance tendency is primarily a result of hormonal development and not primarily of anatomy, gender identity or the socialization that reflects anatomy and gender identity'.<sup>5</sup>

A Christian who reads Professor Goldberg's thesis wants to state it theologically in terms of creation. God has made and makes men and women different, and one of their basic differences lies in the 'headship' which he has given to man. This may well have a genetic basis. If so, man's natural 'drive' needs to be controlled if his 'headship' is to be constructive. For 'patriarchy' sounds paternalistic and 'male dominance' oppressive. Even the biblical word 'submission' is often expounded as if it were a synonym for 'subjection', 'subordination' and even 'subjugation'. All these words have emotive associations. 'Submission' is no exception. We have to try to disinfect it of these and to penetrate into its essential biblical meaning. This we shall discover neither from its modern associations nor even from its etymology but primarily from the way it is used in its context in Ephesians 5.

There is little doubt what 'submission' meant in the ancient world in which disdain for women was almost universal. William Barclay sums it up: 'The Jews had a low view of women. In the Jewish form of morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman" ... In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband's possession to do with as he willed ... The position was worse in the Greek world ... The whole Greek way of life made companionship between man and wife next to impossible. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere ... In Greece, home and family life were near to being extinct, and fidelity was completely non-existent ... In Rome in Paul's day the matter was still worse ... The degeneracy of Rome was tragic ... It is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere of the ancient world was adulterous ... The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.' Charles Seltman confirms this. In the Roman Empire, he writes, 'A girl was completely under her father's, a wife completely under her husband's, power. She was his chattel ... Her life was one of legal

incapacity which amounted to enslavement, while her status was described as ‘imbecilitas’, whence our word.’ True, this was not the whole picture. Markus Barth tries to redeem the balance: ‘There was also a counter-movement which promoted equal rights for females’, while ‘different periods and different geographical areas produced differing views’. As for Ephesus and its environment, ‘The cult of the Great Mother and the Artemis Temple stamped this city more than others as a bastion and bulwark of women’s rights.’ Nevertheless, the oppression of women prevailed in the ancient world, and their emancipation had scarcely begun. It is against this dark background that Paul’s teaching shines with such a bright light. Yet we still have to ask precisely what is meant by ‘headship’ and ‘submission’.

To begin with, these words do not by themselves establish stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour. Different cultures assign different tasks to men and women, husbands and wives. In the West, for example, it has long been conventional for the wife to do the shopping, cooking and cleaning, together with the feeding, bathing, nappy-changing and minding of babies. In many parts of Africa and Asia the women also work in the fields and carry heavy loads on their heads. Nowadays, however, and rightly, these conventions are recognized as cultural and are therefore being challenged and in some cases changed. Many couples are learning to share the household chores.

In order to understand the nature of the husband’s headship in the new society which God has inaugurated, we need to look at Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the context in which Paul uses and develops the words ‘headship’ and ‘submission’. Although he grounds the fact of the husband’s headship in creation, he defines it in relation to the headship of Christ the redeemer: *for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour* (verse 23). Now Christ’s headship of his church has already been described in 4:15–16. It is from Christ as head that the body derives its health and grows into maturity. His headship expresses care rather than control, responsibility rather than rule. This truth is endorsed by the surprising addition of the words *and is himself its Saviour*. The head of the body is the saviour of the body; the characteristic of his headship is not so much lordship as saviourhood.

If the husband’s headship of the wife resembles Christ’s of his church, then the wife’s submission will resemble the church’s: *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands* (verse 24). There is nothing demeaning about this, for her submission is not to be an unthinking obedience to his rule but rather a grateful acceptance of his care. To quote Markus Barth again: ‘The submission to, and respect for the husband, to which the wife is specifically admonished ... is by no means the submissiveness of a pussycat or a crouching dog ... Paul ... is thinking of a, voluntary, free, joyful and thankful partnership, as the analogy of the relationship of the church to Christ shows.’ Whenever the husband’s headship mirrors the headship of Christ, then the wife’s submission to the protection and provision of his love, far from detracting from her womanhood, will positively enrich it.

### 3. The duty of husbands (verses 25–33)

If the word which characterizes the wife's duty is 'submit', the word characterizing the husband's is 'love'. We might think that nature itself would teach husbands this priority obligation, but many cultures both ancient and modern prove the contrary. Of course a certain tie of affection and desire binds every married couple together, and Paul's Stoic contemporaries taught husbands to 'love'. But the verb they used was the weak word *phileō*; it was Christian teaching which introduced strong, sacrificial 'agapē-love' into marriage. Paul uses two analogies to illustrate the tender care which a husband's love for his wife should involve.

The first is that the husband must love his wife as Christ has loved his church. Already in the Old Testament the gracious covenant which God made with his people Israel was many times referred to as a marriage covenant. Jesus took over this teaching and boldly referred to himself as the Bridegroom.<sup>2</sup> Paul enlarges on the image here and in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3, while in the Revelation we are permitted glimpses of the glorified church 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' and of the coming 'marriage supper of the Lamb'.

What stands out in Paul's development of the theme is the sacrificial steadfastness of the heavenly Bridegroom's covenant-love for his bride. It is this which husbands are to imitate: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her.*

It will be observed that Paul uses five verbs to indicate the unfolding stages of Christ's commitment to his bride, the church. He *loved* her, *gave himself up* for her, to *sanctify* her, having *cleansed* her, that he might *present* her to himself. The statement is so complete and comprehensive that some scholars think it may be a quotation from an early Christian confession, liturgy or hymn. It seems to trace Christ's care for his church from a past to a future eternity. Certainly the words *Christ loved the church*, preceding as they do his self-sacrifice on her behalf, seem to look back to his eternal pre-existence in which he set his love on his people and determined to come to save them. So, having loved the church, he *gave himself up for her*. The reference is, of course, primarily to the cross.

But why did Jesus Christ do it? What was the purpose of his sacrifice? It was *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her*. Perhaps there is a deliberate allusion to the bridal bath which took place before both Jewish and Greek weddings. The tenses of the verbs suggest that the cleansing of the church precedes her consecration or sanctification. Indeed, the cleansing seems to refer to the initial purification or cleansing from sin and guilt which we receive when we first repent and believe in Jesus. It is accomplished *by the washing of water with the word*, or more simply 'by water and word' (NEB). The 'washing of water' is an unambiguous reference to baptism,<sup>4</sup> while the additional reference to 'the word' indicates that baptism is no magical or mechanical ceremony, but needs an explanatory word to define its significance, express the promises of cleansing and new life

in the Spirit which it symbolizes, and arouse our faith. True, some think 'the word' alludes to the candidate's confession of faith or appeal for a clear conscience,<sup>6</sup> rather than to the minister's preaching of the gospel or formula of administration. But it seems more natural to take 'water' and 'word' together as being both administered to the candidate. So when Calvin reached this verse in his expository series, he urged care 'that we do not separate the sacraments from the Word at any time', for 'to have the sign without the promise added to it is but a frustratory and unprofitable thing'. Markus Barth rather delightfully argues that in the context the word of promise can be no other than 'I love you'. He goes on: 'The Messiah as the Bridegroom ... says this decisive "word" to his Bride and thereby privately and publicly, decently and legally binds himself to her and her to him.'<sup>8</sup> It is a solemn word of covenant love.

Having cleansed his bride by water and word, the heavenly Bridegroom's plan is to *sanctify* her and finally to *present* her to himself. The 'sanctification' appears to refer to the present process of making her holy in character and conduct by the power of the indwelling Spirit, while the 'presentation' is eschatological, and will take place when Christ returns to take her to himself. He will present her to himself *in splendour (endoxon)*. The word may hint at the bride's beautiful wedding dress, since it is used of clothing. But it means more than this. 'Glory' (*doxa*) is the radiance of God, the shining forth and manifestation of his otherwise hidden being. So too the church's true nature will become apparent. On earth she is often in rags and tatters, stained and ugly, despised and persecuted. But one day she will be seen for what she is, nothing less than the bride of Christ, 'free from spots, wrinkles or any other disfigurement' (JBP), *holy and without blemish*, beautiful and glorious. It is to this constructive end that Christ has been working and is continuing to work. The bride does not make herself presentable; it is the bridegroom who labours to beautify her in order to present her to himself. His love and self-sacrifice for her, his cleansing and sanctifying of her, are all designed for her liberation and her perfection, when at last he presents her to himself in her full glory. Dr Lloyd-Jones writes: 'Dare I put it like this? The Beauty-Specialist will have put his final touch to the church, the massaging will have been so perfect that there will not be a single wrinkle left. She will look young, and in the bloom of youth, with colour in her cheeks, with her skin perfect, without any spots or wrinkles. And she will remain like that for ever and ever.'

This, then, is Paul's exposition of the implications of Christ's headship. The church's head is the church's bridegroom. He does not crush the church. Rather he sacrificed himself to serve her, in order that she might become everything he longs for her to be, namely herself in the fullness of her glory. Just so a husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself.

After climbing with Paul to these sublime heights of romantic love, many readers sense an anti-climax in verse 28: *Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies*. For in his instruction to husbands to love their wives he seems to descend from the lofty

standard of Christ's love to the rather low standard of self-love. This sense of anomaly has led some commentators to try to translate the sentence differently, but their attempts do not succeed because the next sentence stubbornly refuses to convey any meaning but the obvious one: *He who loves his wife loves himself*. The probable explanation for Paul's descent to the more mundane level of self-love is that he is always a realist. We cannot fully grasp the greatness of Christ's love; it 'surpasses knowledge', as he wrote earlier. Nor do husbands find it easy to apply this standard to the realities of family life. But we all know from everyday experience how we love ourselves. Hence the practical usefulness of the 'golden rule' Jesus enunciated that we should treat others as we would ourselves like to be treated. For we all know this instinctively. It is after all the way we treat ourselves. *For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it* (verse 29a). That is, he feeds it and (it may mean) clothes it, or at any rate looks after it.

This exhortation to a husband to 'nourish and cherish' his wife as he does his own body is more than a useful guide to daily behaviour, however. It also contains an inner appropriateness, since he and his wife have in fact become 'one flesh'. Yet God intends sexual intercourse not only to be a union of bodies, but to symbolize and express a union of personalities. It is when husband and wife become thus deeply one with each other that truly *he who loves his wife loves himself*.

This leads the apostle to return in his thought to Christ and so to reach the climax of his argument. So far he has used two analogies for a husband's love of his wife, namely Christ's loving sacrifice for his bride the church, and the husband's loving care of his own body. Now he fuses the two. Christ's bride and Christ's body are the same (see verse 23), *because we are members of his body* (verse 30). He has incorporated us into himself, made us part of himself in a profound, indissoluble union. This leads Paul to quote Genesis 2:24: *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh* (verse 31) and to declare that *this mystery is a profound one* (verse 32). There seems no reason to doubt that in the first instance he is referring to the mysterious and sacred depths of sexual union itself. But then he immediately goes on to its yet deeper symbolism: *I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church*. In doing so, he not only uses the *egō* of his apostolic authority but actually employs the very expression *egō de legō* ('but I say') which Jesus himself used in the six antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. It is appropriate for him to do so because a 'mystery' is a revealed truth, and the profound 'mystery' here, namely the church's union with Christ, is closely akin to that of Jewish-Gentile unity in the body of Christ, which had been revealed to him and of which he has written in 3:1–6. He thus sees the marriage relationship as a beautiful model of the church's union in and with Christ. When applied to Christ and his church, the 'one flesh' is identical with the 'one new man' of 2:15. Indeed, the three pictures of the church which Paul develops in Ephesians—the body, the building and the bride—all emphasize the reality of its unity on account of its union with Christ.

Verse 33 is a succinct summary of the fuller teaching which Paul has been giving to husbands and wives: *Let each one of you love his wife as himself*, for she and he have become

one, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. It is true that 'respects' translates *phobētai*, meaning literally 'fears', but this verb 'may express the emotion of fear in all its modifications and in all its degrees from simple respect through reverence up to adoration, according to its object'. The apostle began with one couplet 'love' and 'submission'. He ends with another 'love' and 'respect'. We have seen that the love he has in mind for the husband sacrifices and serves with a view to enabling his wife to become what God intends her to be. So the 'submission' and 'respect' he asks of the wife express her response to his love and her desire that he too will become what God intends him to be in his 'leadership'.

#### 4. Summary

Taking the husband first, what Paul stresses is not his authority over his wife, but his love for her. Rather, his authority is defined in terms of loving responsibility. To our minds the word 'authority' suggests power, dominion and even oppression. We picture the 'authoritative' husband as a domineering figure who makes all the decisions himself, issues commands and expects obedience, inhibits and suppresses his wife, and so prevents her from growing into a mature or fulfilled person. But this is not at all the kind of 'headship' which the apostle is describing, whose model is Jesus Christ. Certainly, 'headship' implies a degree of leadership and initiative, as when Christ came to woo and to win his bride. But more specifically it implies sacrifice, self-giving for the sake of the beloved, as when Christ gave himself for his bride. If 'headship' means 'power' in any sense, then it is power to care not to crush, power to serve not to dominate, power to facilitate self-fulfilment, not to frustrate or destroy it. And in all this the standard of the husband's love is to be the cross of Christ, on which he surrendered himself even to death in his selfless love for his bride. Dr Lloyd-Jones has a striking way of enforcing this truth. 'How many of us', he asks, 'have realized that we are always to think of the married state in terms of the doctrine of the atonement? Is that our customary way of thinking of marriage?... Where do we find what the books have to say about marriage? Under which section? Under Ethics. But it does not belong there. We must consider marriage in terms of the doctrine of the atonement.'

As for the wife's duty in the marriage relationship, it surprises me how unpopular this passage is among many women. When it is read at a wedding and it provokes a feminine outcry, I find myself wondering how carefully it has been read and in particular whether it has been read in its total context. Let me spell out five points which will, I hope, demonstrate that it is not the blueprint for oppression which many think, but rather a charter of genuine liberty.

##### *a. The requirement of submission is a particular example of a general Christian duty*

That is, the injunction 'wives submit' (verse 22) is preceded by the requirement that we are to 'submit to one another' (verse 21). If, therefore, it is the wife's duty as wife to submit to her husband, it is also the husband's duty as a member of God's new society to submit to his wife. Submissiveness is a universal Christian obligation. Throughout the Christian



church, including every Christian home, submissiveness is to be mutual. For Jesus Christ himself is the paragon of humility. He emptied himself of his status and his rights, and humbled himself to serve. So in the new order which he had founded he calls all his followers to follow in his footsteps. 'Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another.' Should not the wife even rejoice that she has the privilege of giving a particular demonstration in her attitude to her husband of the beauty of humility which is to characterize all members of God's new society?

This is specially so when it is seen that her self-humbling is not coerced but free. It must have been very obvious in the ancient world. The wife had no status and few rights, as we have seen. Yet the apostle addresses her as a free moral agent and calls upon her not to acquiesce in a fate she cannot escape, but to make a responsible decision before God. It is this which 'begins the revolutionary innovation in the early Christian style of ethical thinking.' Voluntary Christian self-submission is still very significant today. 'Jesus Christ demonstrates rather than loses his dignity by his subordination to the Father. When a person is voluntarily amenable to another, gives way to him, and places himself at his service, he shows greater dignity and freedom than an individual who cannot bear to be a helper and partner to anyone but himself. Ephesians 5 supports anything but blind obedience or the breaking of the wife's will. Rather, this chapter shows that in the realm of the crucified Servant-Messiah, the subjects respect an order of freedom and equality in which one person assists another—seemingly by renouncing rights possessed, actually in exercising the right to imitate the Messiah himself ... A greater, wiser, and more positive description of marriage has not yet been found in Christian literature.'

*b. The wife's submission is to be given to a lover, not to an ogre*

The apostle's instruction is not 'Wives submit, husbands boss'; it is 'Wives submit, husbands love'. Of course there have been examples in every age and culture of cruel and tyrannical husbands, and there have been painful occasions in which in order to maintain the integrity of her conscience, a wife has been obliged to resist her husband's authority. But Paul is describing the Christian ideal, not hideous deviations from it. This has always been obvious to commentators. Back in the sixteenth century Calvin preached. 'Husbands ... should not be cruel towards their wives, or think all things that they please to be permissible and lawful, for their authority should rather be a companionship than a kingship.' Three times the apostle repeats his fundamental charge: *husbands, love your wives* (verse 25); *husbands should love their wives* (verse 28); *let each one of you love his wife* (verse 33). If then the husband's headship is expressed in responsible love for his wife, why should she be reluctant to submit to him? And if a husband desires her to do so, he will know that it is only by loving her that he will succeed.

*c. The husband is to love like Christ*

Does the requirement of 'submission' sound hard to a wife? I think what is required of her

husband is harder. This is not that he 'love' her with the romantic, sentimental and even aggressive passion which frequently passes for genuine love today; instead, he is to love her with the love of Christ. If the husband's obligation to love is repeated three times, so is the requirement to model his attitude and behaviour on Christ's. He is the head of his wife *as Christ is the head of the church* (verse 23); he is to love his wife *as Christ loved the church* (verse 25); and he is to nourish and cherish her *as Christ does the church* (verse 29). Thus his headship, his love and his care are all to resemble Christ's. The highest pinnacle of demand is reached in verse 25 where he is exhorted to love his wife *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. This is the totality of self-sacrifice. He is to love her with what is sometimes termed 'Calvary love'; no higher standard is conceivable. A Christian husband who even partially fulfils this ideal preaches the gospel without ever opening his lips, for people can see in him that quality of love which took Jesus Christ to his cross.

*d. The husband's love, like Christ's, sacrifices in order to serve*

We considered earlier the five verbs of verses 25 and 26. Christ loved' the church and 'gave himself' for her, in order to 'cleanse' her, 'sanctify' her, and ultimately 'present' her to himself in full splendour and without any defect. In other words, his love and self-sacrifice were not an idle display, but purposive. And his purpose was not to impose an alien identity upon the church, but to free her from the spots and wrinkles which mar her beauty and to display her in her true glory. The Christian husband is to have a similar concern. His headship will never be used to suppress his wife. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing towards that 'glory', that perfection of fulfilled personhood which will be the final destiny of all those whom Christ redeems. To this end Christ gave himself. To this end too the husband gives himself in love.

*e. The wife's submission is but another aspect of love*

We have seen that the essence of Paul's instruction is 'Wives submit, husbands love', and that these words are different from one another since they recognize the headship which God has given to the husband. Yet when we try to define the two verbs, it is not easy to distinguish clearly between them. What does it mean to 'submit'? It is to give oneself up to somebody. What does it mean to 'love'? It is to give oneself up for somebody, as Christ 'gave himself up' for the church. Thus 'submission' and 'love' are two aspects of the very same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.

Not that such self-giving is ever easy. I fear I may have painted a picture of married life which is more romantic than realistic. The truth is that all self-sacrifice, although the way of service and the means to self-realisation, is also painful. Indeed, love and pain appear to be inseparable, especially in sinners like us, since our fallenness has not been obliterated by our re-creation through Christ. In marriage there is the pain of adjustment, as the old independent 'I' gives way to the new interdependent 'we'. There is also the pain of

vulnerability as closeness to one another leads to self-exposure, self-exposure to mutual knowledge, and knowledge to the risk of rejection. So husbands and wives should not expect to discover harmony without conflict; they have to work at building a relationship of love, respect and truth.

The giving of oneself to anybody is a recognition of the worth of the other self. For if I give myself up, it can only be because I value the other person so highly that I want to sacrifice myself for his or her self, in order that he may develop his selfhood, or she hers, more fully. Now to lose oneself that the other may find his or her self—that is the essence of the gospel of Christ. It is also the essence of the marriage relationship, for as the husband loves his wife and the wife submits to her husband, each is seeking to enable the other to become more fully himself and herself, within the harmonious complementarity of the sexes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 220–250). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.