

## **Submit To One Another**

Ephesians 5:21-33

August 23, 2009

An office telephone rang one day and a receptionist answered. On the other end of the line a female voice asked, "Is this the Fidelity Insurance company?" "Yes it is," the receptionist replied. "May I help you?" The caller said, "I hope so. I want to talk with someone about having my husband's fidelity insured." The surprised receptionist tried to explain that this was not the kind of insurance that Fidelity handled. Not even Lloyds of London offers that kind of policy. But wouldn't it be wonderful if marital fidelity or faithfulness could be guaranteed or insured?

Building great marriages is one of the biggest challenges of a lifetime. 50 percent of all marriages fail. An additional 30 percent never actually break up but they are less than happy. Every year in America, two million children are told that their parents are getting divorced. And certainly that has an effect on those children emotionally.

Nancy Astor was a member of the British Parliament years ago. One evening she was seated at a banquet table near Sir Winston Churchill. She took offense at some of his sarcastic remarks. "Winston," she said, "If you were my husband, I would put poison in your tea." Churchill replied, "Madam, if I were your husband, I would drink it." Hopefully you don't have any relationships that are that bad.

It would be wonderful if there were fidelity insurance. Paul says something in our Epistle lesson today that comes about as close as we can get to fidelity insurance. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

At the time Paul wrote those words, people had almost forgotten what a good marriage looked like. Most Jews of the first century regarded women with contempt. Each day a good Jew thanked God that he was not born a woman or a Gentile. Women had no legal rights. They were little more than possessions. Divorces were readily available for men but not for women. The Jews lived by a verse in Deuteronomy 24 which reads: "If a wife finds no favor in her husband's sight because of some uncleanness in her, he may write her a bill of divorce."

Some of the more liberal rabbis of that day said that if a wife spoils her husband's supper by adding too much salt that is reason enough for divorce. Some said that if a wife says something bad about her in-laws, that's grounds for divorce.

In this context then the Christian approach to marriage was revolutionary. Jesus opposed these casual divorces. St. Paul declared that in Christ there is "neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female." When it comes to our place in the kingdom of God, all are equal. All are loved by God and welcomed into His family through Jesus Christ.

Some modern feminists read certain words of St. Paul about marriage and are offended by what they perceive as an outdated system of husband controlling wife. But that's not what Paul is saying at all. We need to remember verse 21 of Ephesians 5 because this is the defining principle: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Paul is not saying that the wife should be a slave to her husband and serve his every whim. He's saying that each should serve and love and help and encourage the other.

And of course this principle applies to all of our relationships. I don't want you to sit here today and think – Well he's talking about marriage so this doesn't apply to me. Paul does speak specifically about husbands and wives. But the encouragement to love each other, and serve each other, and put the needs of the other ahead of your own, apply to any relationship – parent and child, brother and sister, friends and neighbors, colleagues and co-workers, boyfriend and girlfriend. Our model to follow in marriage or in any of our relationships is Jesus. Paul says, "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . . husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." When we put Jesus first in our own lives, in our relationships, in our marriages, our Lord does three things that underwrite fidelity insurance. (Please write these down.)

### First, **Christ Corrects.**

All of us come into this world in a state of brokenness. We are by nature sinful and unclean. That's part of the sad legacy of original sin. All of us have our sins and failures. When we submit to Christ and put him first we give him permission to mend our brokenness with the glue of his grace. We humble ourselves and confess our sins and seek his forgiveness. And because Jesus paid for our sins at the cross by his innocent suffering and death, God forgives our sins. Our sins are forgiven, gone, forgotten, and start fresh and new each day. That's an ongoing process that lasts a lifetime. We come to God again and again to ask his forgiveness and in our relationships there are times when we need to say "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you." And then that healing and restoration takes place.

An unhappy wife said to a sympathetic neighbor, "My husband doesn't show any interest in what I do. All he cares about is whatever it is that he does at that place--wherever it is--that he works!" Christ teaches us to listen, to be more flexible, to be more understanding, to be less demanding, to say the right thing at the right time, and at the proper time to be quiet.

The poet Ogden Nash said, "If you want your marriage to sizzle with love in the loving cup; whenever you're wrong, admit it; whenever you're right, shut up."

When we submit to Christ, He corrects us. He forgives us and restores us and He gives us the power to love and forgive one another. A second thing that Christ does for those who submit to Him is this: **Christ Protects.**

I do not mean that He shields us from all accidents or illness. God never promised that our lives would be free from all pain and suffering. What I mean is that God sharpens our consciences so that alarms start sounding when dangers threaten the marriage.

Remember the classic biblical story of King David who committed adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba. One sultry evening he strolled out on his rooftop to catch a bit of a breeze. He glanced around and happened to see on an adjacent rooftop a beautiful woman taking a bath.

The steps toward sexual sin were the same then as now. It began with an innocent attraction. David should have turned away, but a little voice said to him, "Take a good, long look; that is an extraordinarily beautiful woman."

Step II was curiosity. He wanted to see her up close. So he sent for her.

Step III was temptation. Bathsheba's husband was off with the army fighting a war. David was king and she was one of his subjects, his for the taking.

Step IV was lust. The Greek word is "porniya," the word from which we get pornography.

Step V was the act of adultery which later led to murder. Bathsheba became pregnant; therefore, David needed to get rid of her husband.

The steps toward sexual sin I have just described are open to all of us. None of us is immune to temptation. The steps certainly apply to husbands and wives but we can also apply them to other relationships – teenagers who are dating, or college students. But when we submit to Christ, He installs an alarm system in us that rings out a warning. For example, someone at work asks your opinion a lot and treats you with courtesy. You think to yourself: "He treats me really special, which is very different from my husband's attitude." But then the alarm sounds.

At the office you have an attractive colleague of the opposite sex. You really do have some company

business to transact. Why not do it over dinner in a more relaxed setting? Surely both your spouses would understand. But then the alarm sounds.

You're in Minneapolis on business for the entire week. There is a lounge in the hotel where people gather for music, dancing and drinks. At the end of a hard day, is there anything wrong with spending a little time there? Maybe even dancing a few times with someone who looks interesting? Is that unreasonable for a married person? Then the alarm sounds.

Your boyfriend calls you on the phone (what am I thinking) Your boyfriend texts you and says his parents are going to be out of town Friday night. Do you want to come over and hang out a watch a movie, just the two of you. Sounds like fun, but then the alarm sounds.

When we submit to Christ, He makes it more difficult for the devil, the world, and our sinful nature to lead us astray. Christ protects us.

Something else happens within a relationship when we submit to Christ, a marriage relationship or any other relationship

### **Christ Motivates.**

He makes us willing and eager to be submit to one another. This does not mean that we become doormats, that we never have our needs met. It takes strength and self-confidence to put someone else's good ahead of our own. That's especially hard for us men who have been taught that assertive, macho types like John Wayne or Chuck Norris are really what women want.

You cannot love your spouse well unless he or she teaches you how. You may think you are a natural, intuitive lover, but don't be too sure. Husbands and wives often don't have the same needs at the same times. Real love is humble enough to say, "I'm willing to learn how best to love you. I'm willing to listen and to learn what you need from me." Christ makes us eager and willing to learn.

Here is a Sunday afternoon challenge for married couples. Turn off the TV and skip your Sunday afternoon nap or golf. Instead, sit down with notebooks and pens. Each of you should answer this question in writing: **"What do I like best about the way you treat me?"** When you finish, exchange notebooks. Read and talk about what the two of you have written.

The next question to answer in writing is this: **"How do you want me to treat you differently?"** Again, when you finish, exchange notebooks and talk about what you have written.

Finally, a third question: **"What do you need from me?"**

For example, a wife might tell her husband that she needs regular conversation with him. That it drives her up the wall to compete with the TV or the newspaper for his attention during a meal.

A husband might reveal honestly that he needs to hear her say once in a while, "Hey, I'm proud of you! You're still the man of my dreams."

A German sociologist found after extensive research that couples during their first year of marriage talk with each other for seventy minutes per day. This drops to thirty minutes a day during their second year of marriage and reduces further during each successive year. By the eighth year a husband and wife have become nearly silent with each other. That is deadly. In any relationship we need to keep the lines of communication open. By the way I've done a little research of my own and discovered that a teenage boy talks to his girlfriend on the phone an average of 240 minutes per day. (Thank God for the unlimited calling plan!)

In any relationship, our model to follow is Christ. Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church." We are to love others as Christ first loved us. To love unconditionally, to love sacrificially. We forgive others as Christ forgives us. He frees us to see beyond ourselves. Our relationship with Jesus Christ helps us to get rid of that selfish, me first attitude and put others first. That's the kind of relationship God desires for you – where each is able to put the other first and love and support and encourage and take care of the other.

Couples without a relationship with Christ often drift right off the edge into marital failure. But those couples who reverence Christ usually hear a still, small voice within them saying, "Hey, don't let the dream slip through your fingers. I have called you to a beautiful existence together. Don't neglect or abuse it or lose it."

I wish there were a guaranteed fidelity insurance policy for marriages. There is none. But the closest thing to it is St. Paul's inspired guidance to the Ephesians: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Could it be that the single thing your marriage needs most is for both of you to kneel at an altar and make or renew a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord? Then Christ will have a chance to correct, protect, and motivate you.

These principles apply to any relationship, not only husbands and wives, but a dear friend, a neighbor, co-worker, your mom, your dad, sister, brother. Love as Christ loves you. Service and sacrifice rather than selfishness.

A lady from Ohio wrote to Ann Landers with the following wise perspective on marriage: "Love and marriage are a cycle. The more you do for a man, the more he loves you. The more he loves you, the more he tries to do for you. The more he tries to do for you, the more you love him. And so it goes, round and round. It's so simple. Why don't more people figure it out?"

Dear lady from Ohio: the reason more people don't figure it out is because they are blinded by sin or selfishness. But when Christ is present in the hearts and lives of husband and wife, He fixes their hearts and clears their vision. Then they are able and willing and indeed eager to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Amen.