

DON'T LEAVE JESUS OUT OF YOUR MARRIAGE

▶ By: *Tim Challies*

I recently had the opportunity to speak and preach on marriage. This is always a tremendous challenge personally. There's nothing like spending a couple of weeks deep in what the Bible says about marriage to expose my insufficiencies as a husband and to come face-to-face with all the ways I fail to be all God calls me to be and to be all my wife deserves.

More than anything else, I was challenged to continue to ensure Jesus is the center of our marriage. And that challenge came in what struck me as an unexpected way. I was studying the first bit of Paul's great passage on marriage and examining the verses that pertain to wives. Paul means to bring order to the Christian household—"You've turned to Christ in repentance and faith, now here's how to live as a distinctly Christian family saved and shaped by the gospel." And he reveals that in the ordering of a Christian family, the wife's unique contribution is submitting to her husband. Hence the familiar words, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands.*"

Paul doesn't go even one word further before he ties Jesus into it. But let's imagine for just a moment that he didn't. What would Paul's instruction to wives look like without the gospel of Jesus Christ? What would marriage be like without Jesus? It would be something like this:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, for the husband is head of the wife. Wives should submit in everything to their own husbands."

Do you see how cold, and dry, and harsh that is? This is command without example. It is demand without rationale. It is law without gospel. Any human being could come up with that law and, in fact, many have. But that's not the Bible. That's not Christian marriage. It's not Christian marriage until Jesus is enthroned at the very center. So, let's add Jesus back into it.

- "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
- For the husband is head of the wife, *even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior.*
- *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*"

Jesus changes everything! Submission is now distinctly Christian, tied directly to Jesus Christ. A wife cannot submit to her husband in the way God asks her to unless she first knows how the church submits to Christ. She doesn't just submit to her husband but submits as. That's a word of comparison. She submits as the church submits. So a distinctly Christian wife is not merely a wife who has professed faith in Jesus. That's just a start. A distinctly Christian wife is a wife who has professed faith in Jesus Christ and then allowed her mind and heart to dwell on the relationship of Christ to his church. She is a wife who has seen that her submission to her husband is not separate from, but part of, her submission to Jesus Christ. These aren't two different things but one.

A similar pattern is true of a husband. He is called to lead his wife in love, but again, is told to love as. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." All that Paul says to the husband about his unique contribution to marriage is equally centered upon Jesus and equally shaped by the gospel.

This is what makes Christian marriages essentially different. All around the world and in every faith and every culture people get married. But only Christians get to understand marriage as being saturated with Jesus. Only Christians get to enthrone Jesus at the center of marriage. Only Christians get to see and experience the real thing.

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