

PREFACE

Recently, in the context of the first few verses of 1 Corinthians 5, we discussed the God-ordained relationship between husband and wife. Soon (some time in 2019) we just might make it to Chapter Seven, where Paul goes into greater detail about this relationship. It occurred to me this week that not just in the Mosaic Law, not just in the epistles, but also in the Christmas narrative of Joseph and Mary, we see this played out. Let's begin with Joseph.

JOSEPH: SACRIFICIAL DEVOTION

First, let's read again the passage in Ephesians about husbands.

Read Ephesians 5:25-27.

In God's economy, husbands are to love their wives with an extraordinary, sacrificial level of devotion. Their example for this, the template they are to follow, is Christ Himself, who went willingly to the cross so that the church—His “bride” (Revelation 19:7)—would be sanctified (*purified, made holy*), “holy and blameless.”

We first meet Joseph in the gospel of Matthew, when an angel visits him in a dream after he has learned that Mary is pregnant.

By the Way: This is the one and only NT reference to “*the* angel of the Lord” (v24) which in the OT always refers to the pre-incarnate second member of the Godhead. But this is not really an exception to the rule; the angel here is first introduced, in v20, as “*an* angel of the Lord,” so the “*the*” simply points back to the same angel who first spoke to Joseph. Aside from this one instance, the phrase “the angel of the Lord” disappears in the NT.

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

A. T. Robertson explains that,

Betrothal with the Jews was a serious matter, not lightly entered into and not lightly broken. The man who betrothed a maiden was legally husband (*Gen 29:21; Deu 22:23*), and “an informal canceling of betrothal was impossible” (McNeile). Though they did not live together as husband and wife till actual marriage, breach of faithfulness on the part of the betrothed was treated as adultery and punished with death.

By law, Mary should have been stoned to death, and Joseph had no legal obligation to stand with her. But because he was a “righteous” husband (in the best sense of that word) he, first, *believed* the angel—no small thing!—and, second, *obeyed* the angel.

Joseph protected and honored his wife. He sacrificed, to begin, his standing in Nazareth for her; he (as we would say today) had her back. Then he did the unthinkable: until after Jesus was born, Joseph relinquished his right—and in that time and culture, his obligation—to lie with his wife. Not only did he accept that his wife’s first child and son would not be his, but he ensured that she remained “holy and blameless” ([Ephesians 5:27](#)) until Emmanuel was born.

MARY: SUBMISSION

Mary’s example is just a bit more complicated. Let’s again begin with the Ephesians passage—this time the wife’s portion.

Read Ephesians 5:22-24.

By the Way: Just in case someone is still struggling with the apparent imbalance between the obligations of the husband and wife (wife: submit/be subject to; husband: love), I would point you to v21, that closes the previous paragraph. Addressing the whole church, rather than the individuals in a marriage, Paul tells everyone to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Here is the same word used in v22 and v24:

hypotasso = from <G5259> (hupo) and <G5021> (tasso); **to subordinate**; reflexive to obey :- **be under obedience** (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) **in subjection** (to, under), submit self unto.

So *everyone* in the body of Christ is to “submit”/be “subject to” everyone else ([Philippians 2:3](#)) in the same way that wives are to be subject to their husbands. Husbands, however, are given extra obligations over and above this (e.g., sacrificial love, protection).

Now let’s read Luke’s narrative of the Annunciation.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

Note what the angel—in this instance Gabriel, by name—tells her about the birth.

Verse 31: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.”

So far so good; if the angel had stopped there, he could have been prophesying a perfectly normal birth occurring any time during her marriage to Joseph. But he didn’t stop there.

Verse 35: The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."

Imagine just about any ordinary teenage girl of today being told this. But Mary was not ordinary. Her response was immediate—and submissive.

Verse 38: And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."

Here's where it gets interesting. Mary was submitting to her husband's wishes—but not Joseph. Her "husband" in this instance was God. It was God the Spirit who would place the seed in her that would become the incarnate God the Son.

[Back to Ephesians 5.](#)

Verse 22 says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Risking a lightning strike from above, we might even paraphrase this, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as [[Mary was](#)] to the Lord."

In both Mary and Joseph we have a beautiful picture of God's design for marriage—as well as the church. Christ Jesus Himself is always our ultimate example to follow, be we can't go wrong by looking to Joseph and Mary for an eloquent example of sacrificial love and protection in the husband, and devoted submission in the wife.

And included in the Ephesians passage (v21) is the same picture for *everyone* in the body of Christ: loving, attentive, even sacrificial submission of every believer to his brothers and sisters in Christ.