

# Christian Marriage

*By Thomas W. Bear*

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## Introduction

These days, there are many books about marriage available in Christian bookstores. Almost all of them fit into the self-help category that has become so popular. These books have their purpose in providing some practical ideas to help Christian couples improve their marriages. *Christian Marriage* is not written to be another self-help book. For example, it does not give practical ideas about how to share your feelings with one another. Rather, this book provides biblical principles that are foundational to a Christian marriage. If they are applied, they will result in harmony in the marriage and glory to God. Some will undoubtedly say that many problems in marriage are far too complex for such a short book to address. It is the premise of this book, however, that all problems in Christian marriages stem from a failure to live as the Bible teaches. If a Christian couple lives in accordance with God's principles described in *Christian Marriage*, harmony is guaranteed.

The premise of this book is based upon the analogy given in the Bible that depicts Christ as the Husband and the Church as His Bride. If the earthly husband loves his wife as Christ loves the Church and the earthly bride relates to her husband as the Church is instructed to relate to Christ, then nothing can stand in the way of harmony and peace within the marriage. This book examines what it is like for a husband to love his wife as Christ loves the Church and what it is like for a wife to relate to her husband as the Church is instructed to relate to Christ. Christian men and woman are then encouraged to pattern their lives after these models in order to experience God's blessing upon their marriage. At this point, you may be thinking, "How can harmony exist if my spouse does not live according to the biblical model?" Many people think the biggest obstacle to peace within their marriage is their spouse, not themselves. While such a situation might exist, these principles remain God's prescribed remedy. Each married Christian must live according to them in order to fulfill God's desires and purposes for his or her life. When a Christian fails to live according to them, his relationship with God will suffer harm. In contrast, when a Christian lives according to these biblical principles, he is free to enjoy his relationship with God without hindrance, even if the spouse is combative. In addition, as a Christian continues to live according to these principles, God's grace often overflows to even an adversarial spouse resulting in repentance.

As you read on, let the analogy of Christ and His Bride guide your understanding of what is being said. For example, after reading about the husband's role, some might conclude that I am proposing that husbands be weak, "pushovers" that relinquish their God-given role as leaders of the home. But if Christ's example as Husband is brought to fully bear on the subject, then the image we see is not one of weakness but strength. While Jesus meekly walked the face of the earth, He always did the will of His Father no matter how much pain He had to endure. He never ran away from problems. He always reacted with perfect wisdom and strength. But though He lived perfectly as God the Son, He chose to put the interests of others above His own all for the purpose of doing the will of His Father. Though He willingly allowed those He created to torture and kill Him, He was not a weak pushover! Rather, He was the One who conquered death on their behalf.

Lastly, because much confusion has arisen during the past several decades, let us describe characteristics of a true Christian since this book is entitled, *Christian Marriage*. Besides believing the gospel of Jesus Christ with their minds, true Christians believe from their hearts. Their lives are directed and empowered by the Spirit of God. As a result, true Christians no longer live for themselves but for God. They have "lost their life" unto Christ. "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" (*Matthew 10:39*). If you sincerely desire changes in your marriage and yet have failed to trust Jesus with your life in this way, you will not experience the great deliverance that God is able to bring to you. The principles in this book assume that the reader is a Christian: one whose life is fully surrendered to God. Such a life is different than that of the "natural" man. God is able to accomplish "the impossible" in Christians. There is no obstacle in a marriage that prevents Him from making it one that brings great glory to Him and a blessing to us.

## The role of the husband

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).*

When Christian wives fail to submit, husbands often take offense and battles arise, making the home an unpleasant place to live. Often, husbands insist that, until their wives take a submissive posture, conflicts will continually occur that simply cannot be resolved. They believe that unless a wife repents of her “unsubmissive” spirit, the conflict will and must remain. After all, it is for her good that she submits and until she does, the authority structure in the home is upset and not in harmony with God’s clear teaching (Ephesians 5:22). Since such conflicts prevail in so many homes, let us consider how the Christian man should respond in a way that fulfills his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the Church.

The picture that Jesus’ example provides teaches much about the way a husband is to love his wife. The centerpiece of that picture is the cross itself. Jesus gave His life for His Bride (the Church). What can we say about the Bride for whom Jesus died? We only need to look inward for this answer. Where would we place ourselves in the spectrum of submission to His headship? It is true that God is conforming us to the image of Christ. But during the time that we have been Christians, each of us has chosen to please ourselves rather than Christ on numerous occasions. If we are honest in our evaluation of our relationship with Christ our Husband, we will conclude that we have played the role of an adulteress often. In other words, we have gone after “other lovers,” spiritually speaking. As our Husband, Jesus deserves to be our first love. But often we have loved other things more than Him. Often we have lived our lives as if we were the head over them. Often we have failed to trust Him when He brought trials into our lives. Motivated by a desire to be accepted in the eyes of other people, we have failed to identify ourselves with our Husband Jesus. Often we have refused to testify of Him to others when prompted by His Spirit. We have gone headlong after other lovers, hotly pursuing our own desires (lusts). Only when we see ourselves rightly, as wretched apart from Christ and yet washed clean by His blood, can we properly understand what it means to love our wives as Christ loves the Church. Not only must a man love his wife when she does not submit to his headship, he must love her should she leave him for another man. God presents a picture of Christ’s love for His Bride in the book of Hosea. While married to him, his wife committed adultery and became pregnant by other men (Hosea 2:4). Later, she ran away to live with multiple lovers (Hosea 2:5). Yet, Hosea loved her and tried to provide for her even though she had moved in with her lovers (Hosea 2:8). Hosea counted his pain as not worthy of consideration compared to her needs. His love for her drove him to endure the deepest pain; that which comes from the most severe betrayal of the one most loved by him. Eventually, she was sold into slavery and Hosea purchased her back for himself (Hosea 3:2). This is the nature of Christ’s love for the Church. Yes, Jesus deeply desires His Bride to follow Him closely on the path He leads. He knows that her sanctification is absolutely critical for her well-being. But His love drives Him to pursue her with all His heart and soul even when she flagrantly runs after other lovers. As Christians, we have often treated our Husband Jesus in the same way that Hosea’s wife treated him. Rather than cast us off as we deserve, Jesus’ love for us does not wane. To love his wife as Christ loves the Church, a husband simply must die to his own desires. When his wife refuses to submit, instead of being furious with her, he must learn to feel compassion for her and cry out to God on her behalf to have mercy on her. He asks God to protect her from satanic attack that is attracted by rebellion. Knowing he too has failed to submit to God, rather than look down upon her, he must hold her in the highest regard as his beloved bride for whom Christ died.

Many Christian men believe that they have a “right” to expect that their wives submit to their leadership. Such thinking conveys an unbiblical understanding of what it means for a husband to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. While God does indeed hold wives fully responsible to submit to their husband’s leadership, husbands do not possess any “rights” in this matter. According to the dictionary, a “right” is defined as follows: *Something to which one has a just claim; Something that someone may properly claim as due.* According to this definition, a “right” is something deserved. Do Christian men “deserve” complete submission by their wives? According to the Bible, the only thing we really “deserve” is hell. Because of the way we have often treated Christ by going after our lusts, we justly “deserve” that our wives leave us and go after other lovers. Christian men do not have a “right” to expect submission from their wives and therefore are out of line to demand it from them. To demand submission by those under our authority is to “exercise

lordship” over them, something Christ warns against. “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Though Christ is the head of the Church, He demonstrated that to love as He loves, husbands must assume the role of a servant to the object of their love. Though He is God the Son, He became a servant and served us. Though He is God the Son, He washed the feet of His disciples. He put aside His needs and counted them not worthy of consideration.

Peter wrote, “*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers*” (1 Peter 3:7). This command comes on the heels of the command to the wives to submit to their husbands. Then he says, “*husbands, IN THE SAME WAY, be considerate as you live with your wives.*” Though the husband is the head over the wife, he cannot fulfill his responsibility to lead without “discarding his rights” and regarding the needs of his wife and her well being above his own. God tells husbands to treat their wives as if they are “weaker vessels.” This is not a reference to their physical strength but to their relative position under the authority of the husband. It is by nature, a position of weakness. The wife is not at liberty to lead. To fulfill God’s purposes for her, she must obey and follow. God warns those in positions of authority to treat those under them, the “weak,” with respect and understanding. He is especially mindful of how they are treated. “*See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven*” (Matthew 18:10).

Lastly for clarification, by saying these things, I am not suggesting that husbands disobey God’s express will. If his wife asks him to do something that God condemns, or if she asks him to not do something that God commands, he is under obligation to obey God rather than his wife (Acts 4:19, Daniel 3:16-18).

### ***Reacting to a wife’s insubordination***

Since husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, their response must mimic that of Christ. But since we fail so often to love like Jesus, let us consider how we must address such situations knowing that we are merely sinners saved by grace. Because we still have sinful flesh, there will be occasions when our emotions react in sinful ways. Though we may accept the principles described above, we must realize that our flesh has difficulty discarding its desire to be in authority. The flesh hates the idea of submission to God and to other human beings. In order to react as Christ would react, the Spirit of Jesus must be in control within us. It is important to understand, therefore, that there are two possible controlling agents, the Spirit of Jesus or the flesh. Paul says that we are to “walk in the Spirit” and we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Walking in the Spirit requires faith. We must be looking beyond our circumstances to God as our power and wisdom. We must “believe” what He has declared. When we do, we are empowered by His Spirit to live like Jesus and react as He would react. So, let us imagine for a moment a situation in which a wife fails to submit to her husband’s leadership. We know from Scripture that it is sinful for her to do so but we know also from Scripture that God calls the husband to take on the role of a servant even though He has placed him in a position of authority over his wife. If his wife’s lack of submission is producing anger within him, he should identify this as a fleshly reaction, not one that is spiritual. Then, he must call to mind what God has said that bears light on the situation at hand. God said that He is working all things together for the good of His children (Romans 8:28). “All things” includes the sin of others, including those of our wives (see the Appendix, *God’s Providence Over the Sins of Others*). We must recognize a wife’s failure to submit as something orchestrated by God for His glory and her husband’s good. It must be considered a trial of faith. Husbands must, in this way, submit to Him and consider that He is wise and loving to bring about this situation in which a wife fails to submit. In situations like this, obedience is learned just as Jesus learned obedience from the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). There is a choice in situations like this to persist in the demand for submission, and continue in anger, or believe God. In other words, it is a choice to walk by sight (fleshly) or walk by faith (spiritual). According to the Bible, “the justified” (Christians) shall walk by faith. If a husband never learns how to discard his “rights” and serve his wife when she sins against him, then he

proves himself not able to walk by faith. There can be no subjective assurance of salvation if we never learn to walk by faith (trust God). From this discussion we observe that God uses the submission of the wife as a means of her sanctification and He uses her lack of submission as a means of a husband's sanctification. If a wife consistently fails to submit to her husband, he should realize that God is at work to produce in him a heart of submission to Him, and a genuine faith that glorifies Him.

In summary, though Christian wives have a responsibility to submit to their husbands, Christian husbands fail to love their wives whenever they demand submission from their wives. To fulfill his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, a husband must abandon his "rights" and take on the role of servant to his wife. His attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross*" (Philippians 2:5-8). If a husband finds himself getting angry when his wife rebels, he must identify such a response as fleshly. Such situations must be viewed as orchestrated by God to produce hearts of true obedience toward Him and a faith that glorifies Him. When a husband lives this way, he is able to enjoy peace in the presence of God no matter how badly his wife may treat him. He is free from bitterness and the desire for control.

### **Books Written by Tom Bear**

**Church (according to the Bible):** Most pastors wish that the members of their churches would grow and flourish more. The church members often sense that God has purposes for them but they don't know what He wants them to do. They often end up playing the role of an unfulfilled spectator. Church examines the early New Testament Church and its teachings for answers to this universal problem. It demonstrates how certain unbiblical attitudes and traditions exist which cultivate this unhealthy spectator mindset. Church challenges leaders and "laypeople" to identify and discard these unbiblical attitudes and practices that stifle spiritual health. This book asserts that if the pattern of the early New Testament Church is followed today, Christians will mature at a greater pace and experience fulfillment as active participants in the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. (160 pages)

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E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006J749NM>. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/other-books>.

**Christian Marriage:** This book provides biblical principles that if applied, will result in harmony in the marriage and glory to God. Some will undoubtedly say that many problems in marriage are far too complex for such a short book to address. It is the premise of this book, however, that the source of all problems in Christian marriages are the result of failure to live as God has taught us to live in His Word. If a Christian couple lives in accordance with God's principles described in *Christian Marriage*, true harmony is guaranteed. (50 pages)

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