

Introduction:

Wives, do you want to be victorious? I know you do. Nobody gets married with the goal of failing. Nobody gets married saying, "I'm going to be a rotten wife and have a rotten husband and raise rotten kids and just stink up this whole family thing." The problem is too many of us get into marriage with very dim ideas about what the victory is. Too many of us think victory means having that butterflies-in-the-stomach feeling for the rest of our lives. Most of us Christians at least have the notion that if we get to heaven at the end of it, we're victorious. And while heaven is a great goal, even this falls short. God did not establish marriage simply so we could get to heaven. God established marriage to be a Passion Play to the world (if you haven't heard or read "The Meaning in Marriage," preached on March 1, 2015, you need to do so to fully understand this victory). That is, God established marriage as a dramatization to our children and to the world of Christ's sacrificial and saving relationship with His bride, the church (cf. **Ephesians 5:22-33**). The meaning in marriage is to so conduct ourselves as to display the sacrifice of Christ and the submission of the church in such a way as to protect, preserve, promote, and propagate God's sanctuary with man throughout the whole world.

So, if this is the meaning of marriage, what does it take to be a victorious wife? As **Ephesians 5:22-33** says, it takes representing Christ's church, its submission, and its respect to your children and to the world through your relationship with your husband. Consider with me the victorious wife.

Discussion:

I. The Victorious Wife begins with a Victorious Husband

- A. Men and husbands, after hearing our previous lesson, I know some of you have been waiting for me to give a shellacking to your wives, straightening them out, because you think if they could just straighten out and respect you properly, submit to you properly, and treat you properly, you would do better and your marriage would be better. Brothers, this is simply not true. And it is not the way God expects it to work.
- B. In large and small ways, we have unwittingly propagated this mistaken view of marriage. I know I have. I've thought it. I've prayed for it. I've told Marita that's the way it is. But I was wrong.
 1. In fact, just this week, I saw on Facebook a meme that said, "A man's success has a lot to do with the kind of woman he chooses to have in his life." Now I know that the brother who posted it was striving to bless his wife and let her works praise her in the gates. I have no doubt she deserves it (as do our wives) and to that extent I completely agree with the meme.
 2. However, there is a subtle misdirection in this meme that Satan wants to take hold in the hearts and minds of husbands everywhere. You see, for the husband praising his wife and thanking her for her support of his success, this is great. But too many husbands think this exact same thing, but they don't see themselves as successful. Their marriages are in shambles (even if not publicly), their work lives are not what they wanted them to be, they haven't accomplished all that they wanted, their kids aren't going in the direction they wanted. Then they see a meme like this one and think they've discovered the problem. "Ah," they say, justifying themselves, "Success has to do with the kind of woman I chose. I chose the wrong kind of woman. If I could just get the right kind of woman or make this one the right kind of woman, then I'd be victorious." And men, you are wrong.
- C. In reality, the victory of our wives begins with our victory. Think about this, husbands. **Ephesians 5:22-33** relates our marriages to Christ's marriage with His bride the church. How victorious can the church be without Christ first being victorious? Christ can be victorious without a submissive and respectful bride, but the church cannot be victorious without first having the victorious Savior in Jesus Christ.
- D. (Please, as we draw these parallels, do not confuse having the victory of salvation as men and women with being a victorious husband or wife. No one has to be married to have the victory of eternal salvation. However, a man is not a victorious husband simply because he is going to heaven. He is a victorious husband when he presents Christ to the world through his relationship to his wife. And a woman is not a victorious wife simply because she is going to heaven. She is a victorious wife when she presents the church to the world through her relationship with her husband. And husbands, like it or not, a wife's victory begins with a victorious husband just as the church's victory begins with the victorious Christ.)

- E. Husbands, step up and take responsibility. If you are not being victorious, your wife is not responsible for that. However, if your wife is not victorious, though you may not be to blame for all of it, you are responsible. That means it is your responsibility to act in a way to promote her victory.

II. The Victorious Wife is Saved, Sanctified, and Washed by Her Victorious Husband

- A. A couple of months ago, Eric Barth threw me a curveball. I really thought I understood all these marriage passages and was looking forward to preaching a pretty standard series on marriage and family when we got to that part of our Victorious! Year. But one night he asked me about **Ephesians 5:26-27**. I don't remember his exact wording, but he basically said, "Edwin, I know **Ephesians 5** is setting up a parallel between what Christ does for His church and what I'm supposed to do for my wife. But what on earth is my parallel responsibility to Jesus washing the church with the water of His Word?" I opened my Bible ready to read and spit out a pat and clichéd answer. But when I looked at the verse, it was like I was reading it for the first time. Why had I never asked that question? How could I have always overlooked that part of the parallel? I hemmed and hawed about some possibilities, but ultimately my answer was, "I don't know." It is because of that question that I've studied more deeply into the meaning of marriage and the roles of husbands and wives. So if you don't like these lessons, go talk to Eric. No, actually, I'll take responsibility for them.
- B. So what is the parallel there and what does it mean for victorious husbands and victorious wives?
1. Allow me to set the word picture in your mind be reminding you of the story of Esther.
 - a) If you've never heard or read the story of Esther, you can find this part of it in the Old Testament in **Esther 2**. King Ahasuerus was looking for a wife. Women from all over the Medo-Persian Empire were brought to the king's palace in Susa. Then they were beautified. According to **Esther 2:12**, the women went through a 12-month beautifying regimen, 6 months with oil of myrrh and 6 months with spices and ointments. Then they were presented to the king to see if they were pleasing to him.
 - b) Now, I understand there are aspects of pleasing that king that do not parallel what Paul is describing in **Ephesians 5:26-27**. However, what I hope we recognize is the picture of a kingly husband looking out among commoners, wishing to select one who will be separated out (sanctified if you will), and become his bride. However, before even considering her, he himself washes, cleanses, and beautifies her, giving her the best possible chance she could ever have of being pleasing to him.
 - c) That is what Jesus is doing with His bride the church.
 2. However, there is an even more specific image that we should see: God's relationship with Israel (**Ezekiel 16:1-14**).
 - a) Israel is presented as an infant abandoned by her parents. It is a brutal picture of an exposed baby, left to die in the wilderness. Passersby ignored the screaming infant. But God loved the infant and gave her life. When the infant grew to womanhood, God Himself washed her, anointed her, clothed her, adorned her with jewelry, fed her with fine foods. God says of her, "You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord" (ESV).
 - b) God Himself made Israel a bride He could present to Himself as splendorous, beautiful, without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. He didn't wait around for Israel to straighten up, shape up, and be the wife He wanted her to be. He, the Victorious Husband, led His bride to victory as a wife.
 - c) Brothers, that is what Christ has done and is doing for His church. He did not wait for the church to clean itself up, fix itself, be the kind of bride He wanted her to be. He is leading His wife to that through His sacrifice, through nourishing and cherishing her, and through His Word. Jesus's bride is victorious because He is victorious. He has taken responsibility for His bride's victory.
 3. Husbands, that is our job. It is our job, being governed and guided by the Word of God, to sacrifice ourselves for our wives, nourishing and cherishing such such that by our victorious efforts they can grow into the Victorious Wives God has designed them to be. It is our job to take the responsibility and respond to our wives such that they are free to respect and submit to us just as the church does to Christ. And yes, this very specifically means that if our wives have spot, wrinkle, or blemish, it is our job to beautify them (spiritually speaking). It is our job to present our wives to ourselves as someone we find loveable.
 - a) But do not misunderstand. We do not accomplish that by browbeating, berating, and belittling our wives. We do not accomplish that by commanding, controlling, or commandeering our wives. We do that the same way Jesus does, by sacrificing ourselves and by nourishing and cherishing her as our own bodies. We do that by loving her and leading her with God's Word.
 - b) May I point out here that several of us had a good laugh after the sermon "The Meaning in Marriage" as I described the passion or suffering of Christ and then presented the idea that our marriages are

to be a Passion Play, a dramatization that presents the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus for His bride, the church. Some of us joked around about suffering in marriage and now understanding why. But all joking aside, I want us to understand that **Ephesians 5:22-33** demonstrates marriage as the relationship between Christ and the church, not between Christ and the Jews and Romans. Jesus suffered for His bride, on behalf of His bride, but not because of His bride.

C. Of course, some will ask, "But what if I wash, sanctify, and beautify my wife, but she rejects it?"

1. First, let me point out that this will very much be the exception.

a) The very characteristic of wives that drives most husbands crazy will actually work in our favor when we treat our wives properly. I don't know if it is by creation or by culture, but our wives are more in tune with emotions and feelings than we men usually are. They have a harder time shutting down their emotions and feelings and a harder time responding in contrast to their emotions than we do. And it often drives us nuts. Sadly, we belittle them for the very thing that will actually most make them respond to appropriate husbanding and to the very thing that most lets us know when we are falling short of being Christlike.

b) The thing that you need to understand is that emotions are given to us as indicators that something is wrong and needs to be protected or healed.

(1) Think about this. The purpose of physical pain is to indicate that something is physically wrong. If you ignored the physical pain, you could experience amazingly life-threatening burns from putting your hand on a hot stove. If you ignored the physical pain, you wouldn't know to remove your finger from the door jamb until it was completely cut off. If you ignored the physical pain, you wouldn't know to clean out and bandage the blister on your foot until it was infected and in danger of needing to be cut off.

(2) Emotional pain is the same kind of indicator. It indicates that something is wrong. When we are hurt, sad, angry, afraid, it means something is amiss and needs to be addressed. We men more easily ignore these indicators, but our wives are not as able to do that. And that is a good thing. We need a body that sends messages to the head that the hand is resting on a hot stove.

(3) So, when you are not behaving in a Christlike fashion, your wife is going to have an emotional reaction to it. Try as she might not to, she will likely even have a physical response that is governed by those emotions. She'll start crying, yelling, retreating. The sad part is if this response leads her to do something we think is wrong, we usually won't learn from her emotional indicators that something is wrong with our behavior, we just rebuke her for her bad behavior.

(4) I recently read a great illustration of what we often do. Let me ask you this. If someone walked through these doors right now and they had been stabbed with a knife, would we rebuke them for bleeding on the carpet? Of course not, that would be exceedingly cruel. We'd try to help them be healed of the damage. How much more cruel would it be if the very person who stabbed them then started rebuking them for bleeding on the carpet? And yet, that is what we husbands often do. We do something emotionally painful to our wives, then we rebuke them for bleeding their emotional pain on our carpet, expecting the church to back us up in this rebuke. And sadly, churches often do.

c) But this also shows why it will be the exception for your wife not to respond to Christlike husbanding. Just as she is practically hardwired to have a negative emotional response when you don't nourish and cherish her like Christ does the church, she is practically hardwired to have a positive emotional response when you do. Granted, if you have repeatedly mistreated her, an initial change may be viewed with skepticism (and probably rightly so). But I can almost completely guarantee us husbands that if our wives have gotten to a point of emotional distress that responds extremely negatively to us, we put her there and she will find it nearly impossible to change until we do. It will be the extreme exception that a woman who is married to someone like Jesus will reject him.

2. However, **Ezekiel 16:15ff** demonstrates that it is possible. That is exactly how Israel treated the Lord God, committing adultery with other gods.

a) And certainly we know that God brought judgment upon His bride, Israel, putting her away. However, I encourage you to consider the contrasting images of God's judgment and love presented in **Hosea**.

b) In **Hosea**, God called the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute and use his relationship with her as a message to the children of Israel. Surrounding their relationship, God provides oracles for Israel.

c) Much of **Hosea** is God's judgment on Israel. Much of it is the putting away because of her whoring with other gods. However, note a few passages that we might often overlook. Consider **Hosea 2:14-**

15, when God says He will allure Israel and speak tenderly to her, giving her vineyards, that will prompt her to respond to Him as she did in her youth. Then notice **Hosea 11:8-9**. After just expressing His judgment on them, He says, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?...My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger..." (ESV).

- d) Brothers, I understand that in the practicalities of human relationships, God has allowed an exception to His general prohibition against divorce. I know that **Matthew 19:9** demonstrates it is lawful to put your wife away for sexual immorality and if you marry another you are not committing adultery. Nothing I'm saying today is intended to deny that. However, I hope we can see that if God who was the perfect husband loved His bride so much that after she rejected Him, He recanted on His anger when she prayed to Him, how much more can we who are imperfect do the same? And how much more certainly should we respond that way if our wife's negative reactions to us have not consisted of the sexual immorality that is given as an exception to the divorce rule? How much more ought we to persist in sacrificing for our wives, alluring them with tenderness and compassion as we continue to nourish and cherish them.

III. Eve's Failure and the Church's Victory

- A. As demonstrated above, it is possible to have a Victorious Husband and reject his leadership. Therefore, I can't just end this sermon leaving the impression that as long as the husband is being victorious, the wife will too. Instead, wives, you need to recognize your role in the home as well.
- B. In **Genesis 2:18**, God created you as a helper to your husband. You are the physical embodiment of God's help to your husband. You need to act like it. As **Proverbs 31:12** says, you are to do your husband good and not harm all his days.
- C. Specifically notice Eve's failure in the garden. Certainly she failed by eating the fruit, but that is not where her failure began. As we noted in the lesson for Victorious Husbands, Eve was not present when God gave His command about the tree. She had to learn that from her husband. In **Genesis 3:1**, when the serpent questioned what God actually said and then claimed God knew eating of the tree would actually be good for Eve, what should she have done? She should have turned to her husband. She should have sought his direction and council. It was his job to teach her what God said. However, she didn't trust her husband, she didn't trust God, she trusted the serpent, a beast of the field. She turned God's order on its head. As we learned in our previous lesson, God's creation order was God leading man who was to lead his wife, both of whom were to have dominion over the beasts of the field. Eve, however, took her lead from the serpent, a beast of the field, and then took authority over her husband. She failed.
- D. In **Ephesians 5:22-24**, we learn about the church. It submits to Christ. Christ is its head. Therefore the church submits to what He says and where He leads. The church does not act on its own authority, but submits to the authority of Jesus Christ. If the wife would be victorious, she must learn to submit to her husband, respecting him and demonstrating to the world how the church responds to Jesus.

IV. "But what if my husband doesn't act like Jesus?"

- A. The fact is, there isn't much to say to wives when their husbands are being true representatives of Jesus Christ. In fact, if you have that kind of husband, you, no doubt, find it rather easy to submit to him. After all, when the head tells the hand to let go of the hot stove, it submits with ease. When the head tells the body to take a nice, soothing, hot bath, it submits with ease. When the head tells the body to do something that the body appreciates and likes, it is easy to submit. Even when the head tells the body to do something that is not immediately gratifying, but is good for the body in the long term, the body more easily submits. However, what about when the husband is not victorious? What about when the husband falls short or even rebels against his own duty? What then?
- B. In this case it is important to remember that the entire household code in **Ephesians 5:22-6:9** is actually expounding on the principles taught in **Ephesians 5:2, 21**. While the husband has a special calling to sacrifice for his wife as Jesus did for His and the wife is called in a special way to submit to her husband as the church does to Christ, there is a real sense in which all of us are to love and sacrifice for each other and also to submit to each other. Therefore, sisters, when your husbands are not living as Christ, I want to encourage you to love them and give yourself for them as Christ did for you. What this means is when your husband refuses to be Christ in the marriage, you can't be a Victorious Wife. You simply can't. There is no way you can show the world how the church submits to Christ if your husband won't represent Christ. However, you can still be a Victorious Christian. Strive for that.

- C. In **I Peter 3:1-2**, God calls you to be subject to husbands who do not believe. If they don't believe what Jesus did for the church, they obviously aren't allowing that to govern their behavior. And yet Peter encourages you to respectful behavior and pure conduct anyway.
- D. Please consider the following account of Abigail and Nabal as a guide (**I Samuel 25**). The setting is that David, while on the run from Saul, has cared for Nabal's shepherds and flocks without even being asked. When it is a feast day, David asks Nabal to provide for him and his men during the feast. Nabal tells him no because he's just an upstart rebelling against the king. When Abigail hears this, she knows it is foolish and will cause the destruction of Nabal and the entire household. I know I can't answer all the questions that might come up for all situations, but I see 5 keys to Abigail's conduct in this account that can be somewhat of a guide for you.
1. *Abigail acted in her husband's best interests:* When she found out David was planning on killing only the males, she could have seen it as an opportunity to be free of her husband. Or she could have gone and made herself out to look good and pleaded that David only take his wrath out on Nabal and not on his household. But she didn't, she pleaded for all of them including Nabal.
 2. *Abigail acted based on God's Word:* Somehow Abigail knew about the promise of God to David to make him king. She also knew what God's Word said about murder and taking matters into your own hands. She knew that Nabal was going against God's Word. She didn't step up in leadership because she didn't like what he said, but because he was against God's Word.
 3. *Abigail did not participate in the servant's bad-mouthing of her husband:* As far as we can see, Abigail did not commiserate with the servant about what a worthless fellow her husband was. They didn't have a little pity party for themselves and pat each other on the back for what they had to put up with.
 4. *Abigail was honest about her husband's wrongs:* When Abigail was talking to David, she was not being disrespectful to refer to her husband's folly. First, she was pleading in a way that would appeal to David. Second, she was speaking to the one to whom such a statement would make a difference. Sadly, many women labor under the misconception that when their husbands are doing wrong, they have only two choices. Either 1) just suck it up, hide and suppress the truth, and smile for all to see or 2) divorce them. Notice, Abigail didn't take either of these options. She was honest with the person who needed to hear the honesty. But remember, she didn't wallow in this self-pity with the servant. Sisters, if your husband is sinning, please talk to your shepherds about it. Get them involved in the counsel that will help your marriage. If your husband has hit you, tell the shepherds and call the police.
 5. *Abigail didn't hide what she had done from her husband:* I understand in this case Abigail seemed to take an "it's easier to get forgiveness than permission approach," but she didn't keep her actions secret. She did wait until her husband could understand what happened. But she told him. I think this is important namely because if whatever action you are taking is a secret you must keep from your husband, it is probably not the right thing to do. Keeping a secret bank account so that he won't know you're saving up to leave him is not a good idea. Secretly spending money or secretly developing relationships with others are not right things to do.
- E. Finally, I would encourage you to recognize there is a difference between a Nabal and a husband who is growing in the Lord but falls short. None of us is going to measure up fully to Jesus. We may all be striving, but we are going to make mistakes. We are growing just as you are. We do need you to let us know when we sin against you so we can grow to be more Christ. However, when you do that, please do so from a desire to help us fulfill our role and the duty Christ has given us, not out of a desire to put us in our place or out of a desire to put yourself in our place.

Conclusion:

Wives, don't be Eve in your marriage, be the church. Submit and show respect. Let the world see in you and your marriage the loving and respectful response of the church to Christ.