

Ephesians 5:22–33

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] That's Ephesians 5, 22 to 33. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the 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. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

[1 : 33] Well, good morning. It is always a joy to be together on these Sundays as we move our way, especially through the book of Ephesians.

I'm thinking of that phrase in the text today, and this mystery is profound. Something on marriage, yet he says it refers to Christ and the church.

What is the relationship between the church and Christian marriage?

Heavenly Father, I now pray that as we look at this text together, our hearts would be loosened like soil.

They would be tilled. That we receive with joy, even, all that we can understand. In Christ's name, amen.

[2 : 36] From the years 1984 to 1988, Lisa and I lived about an hour and 15 minutes north of Boston.

We were in rural New England. We came to appreciate, while she was working full-time and I was doing my grad work, these New England farms.

They were quaint, and they were separated on property lines by stacked stone. Probably centuries old by now, farmers had cleared their fields for planting and had lined their own domain, as it were, through these three-foot-high walls that still rise gracefully over the New England countryside to define the field.

I thought of that this week as I looked at this text. I thought of farmers clearing the field of rocks that they might then till the soil, all in preparation of planting the seed.

There's no planting of seed and the promise of harvest without the tilling of soil. There's no tilling of the soil until there is a release of the rocks.

[4 : 13] And when I look at our text, it feels to me like it's a difficult field. It's a field. It's a field in God's word that as we look out across it and desire to receive a fruitful harvest from it, well, we'll simply be incapable of it until we clear it of a few stones and till it to be receptive of the seed.

It's one of those texts that today we would call a hard text, a difficult text, a stony passage of things that get in the way of our ability to hear it.

And so if you're thinking about moving with the message today, it's simply thinking through the preacher's desire to remove some stumbling blocks from you as we look across this text.

To woo you again with some tilling of the soil that there might be something profitable to attain from this text. All in hopes of planting the very seed of God's word that we would hear it and it would bear

fruit in our lives.

All from this text. Well, what kind of stones need to be removed before I have any hope of you hearing what is here?

[5 : 45] It seems to me the removal of stones in one corner of this field is the boulder of what we could just call patriarchal authoritarianism.

This kind of Pauline heavy handedness of maleness and femaleness. This husband, this wife, this world that this boulder sits where we sense that there's something wrong here.

How do we remove our inclinations on this text? Well, let me say there's nothing here that would divert us from the notion that the sexes are created equal.

Remember the book of Genesis, God created man, male and female. He created them in his own image, in his own likeness. He created them.

Whatever is happening in the field of this text, it doesn't subvert or undermine the equality, what they would call the ontological equality between a man and a woman, equally made in the very divine image of God.

[7 : 08] If there's something here of distinction, of particularity between the way a man and a woman relate in Christian marriage, it's not ontological at all.

It's not in substance with your being. It's particular directives that functionally matter for a meaning that's greater than a husband and wife, namely Christ and the church.

That's a big boulder that seems to get in the way, this idea that men are superior to women. And think of the social cost of that boulder in the field of this text.

Think of the men in Christian tradition or even other religions who have taken this understanding of marriage and headship and authority.

Think of the abuse. Think of the control. Think of the restrictions. Also undermining of what the Bible would teach.

[8 : 15] I want to dislodge this text from that stubborn stone. I want to say it multiple times that there's nothing here that can rightly be used to indicate some inequality between the husband and the wife.

I want to say that there's no support here for any man who would think he could utilize this text in a subversive or undermining way in regard to the glory of his wife or to women in general.

There is nothing here that offers a man carte blanche on orders within the home. The untold sins that have been committed out of the soil of this field to be repelled, to be removed, to be taken back.

There's another stone, though, in this field, which is kind of laying at the opposite end of the text. It's not just unwarranted patriarchal authoritarianism.

It's this idea, this weight, this discomfort, this stumbling block of, and the wife is to submit to her husband. And then the text goes on to say in everything.

[9 : 37] What an impediment that is to receiving anything from the text. You know, some people have tried to remove this stone of submission, this word of negative, necessarily negative connotation.

And they've tried to remove it by appealing back to verse 21. Would you take a look there? I mean, in a rightful effort to remove the ungodly nature and understanding of this word, that there's a reference to verse 21, where we read it as though it is a banner that makes the material substance of submission meaningless.

Here it is, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. And so people will say, well, that's the way one removes this submit in everything.

We submit to one another. So whatever the material substance of submission is within this field, it is meaningless in any practical terms because of mutual submission, which is enjoined in verse 21.

I've looked at that idea, that way of bringing a backhoe in and removing submission from our text by way of meaning through an appeal to verse 21.

[11 : 12] But grammatically, I struggle with it every time I have to face it down. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, and in the original language, the verb must be resupplied.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Chapter 6, verse 1, children to your parents. Chapter 6, verse 5, bond servants to their masters.

This heading of submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ means then something like this in the field of marriage.

Something like that in the field of parental child obligations. Something like this in the agrarian terms there of the master and his household.

So submission is not void of material substance because it happens in this way in Christian marriage.

[12 : 25] That said, though, it kind of leaves it there, doesn't it? It leaves that there's something here that matters, that means something for the Christian wife who is in marriage.

What might it mean? How would it possibly be good? How would a woman here today, single or married, consider the substance of this field?

In ways that she would lovingly nurture this in her life? Well, these stones are in the field, but there's a tilling that needs to take place.

I was just this last couple of days in Wisconsin driving through the fields. The plantings are a little late this year, given the rain of the spring and the coldness of the hour.

But now they are beginning to till the soil for the receptivity of the sea. They're beginning to plant.

But, you know, when you till something, you actually turn up littler things that need to be thrown out of the field.

[13 : 53] All the while creating a furrow where your heart might actually be open to receive something. So what is it then that would open the furrows of my soul to receive something here that is foreign to my disposition?

Let me give you three or four things that I hope might woo your heart to the terrain of this text. It's a shame, I think, that this text is always viewed negatively today, especially given the context.

Can I show you a couple of things? Take a look. How can we forget that these verses are manifestations of what it meant to be filled with the Spirit?

Do you remember that? This word submitting in verse 21 is the fifth word that is actually connected to the verb of what it is in verse 18, to be filled with the Spirit.

To be filled with the Spirit involves addressing one another in psalms and hymns, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting.

[15 : 15] Submitting is somehow in the text, in Paul's mind, connected to the glories of what it is to be filled with the Spirit.

Now, you take it even back a little further into the broader context, because that verse 18 in chapter 5 is connected to verse 2 of chapter 5, which says, Verse 1, Just as God in himself is three distinct persons, equal, yet functionally working in concert with one another to show the manifestations of Father and Son and Spirit, So too, in marriage, he's indicating that there's something going on in Christian marriage that is imitating God, who is distinct in person, equal in substance, yet working in such a way as to display the full manifestation of all his glories.

That's what these verses are rooted in, and that ought to act like a blade through my soul that runs through and turns over smaller impediments that I'm willing now to cast from the field, in hopes that if I understand the text correctly, I might actually be working toward what it is to be filled in the Spirit. I might actually be closer to what it is to be imitating the very activity of God. Let me give you even a third one. Notice, this text falls within even a broader concern of Paul to help us walk in ways that are worthy of the hope to which we've been called.

This is amazing to me. Go back to chapter 4 and verse 1 and following. I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

[17 : 42] That Paul has put down these 40 acres on Christian marriage in a letter within the context of what it is to be filled with the Spirit, to be imitators of God, and how it is that I walk through this wilderness world in ways that are worthy of the calling to which I've been called.

Which is nothing less than being the bride of Christ. Now, these things are phenomenal to me. This movement, then, in my message is from the removal of stones to encountering some stones that I'm not sure what to do with, to the tilling of the soil.

The tilling of the soil. Is there something here about being Spirit-filled? As a woman, as a wife, as a husband, as a spouse. There's something here that he has for us, single or married, about what it is to imitate God and the world as his creation.

There's something here that would help me to walk in a worthy way. So then let's plant some seed. Let's plant some seed.

First on wives in relationship to Christian marriage. The seed that's planted is verses 22 to 24. These verses highlight what a Spirit-filled walk of a wife who loves Jesus looks like in relationship to her husband.

[19 : 20] Can I signpost what it is so you can see it ahead of time? Let me just signpost it. What is highlighted here for the Christian wife concerning a Spirit-filled life?

Three words. Deference by design for the purpose of display. That's what's here.

Those are the seeds. Deference by design for the purpose of display. Deference. Verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Notice, first of all, this word submission. I'm using the word deference. There is a deference that the wife has for the husband.

This is not some unilateral sense of just principle obligation. This is personal. This is relational. This is volitional.

[20 : 20] And this is to the woman. It says here, as to the Lord. You are acting in ways as unto the Lord.

Personal. In other words, it's rooted. This deference is rooted out of a personal relationship, not out of some blind principle that no matter what they say goes. Deference.

But notice, it says here in the text, by design. Very important word there in verse 23. For. Deference is there.

For. The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. His body and is itself, himself, its savior. By design.

By design. That somehow by design, God has made the husband the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.

[21 : 23] I know it's by design, because if you look all the way down in verse 31, he's quoting Garden of Eden material.

This isn't some culturally accommodated design that Paul is adopting given the world in which he lives. No, this is not a culturally adopted sign that can be discarded through the ages, depending upon where you are.

This for. He's the head of the wife is rooted. Verse 31. In quotations that bring you back to Genesis 1 and 2.

That at creation, God designed men and women, male and female, to be one flesh without any loss of equality, but functionally relating in ways that put on display who he is.

So God, think of it this way. In Genesis 1 and 2, you're in the garden. But in one sense, God goes into the garden ground, and he forms a man from the soil.

[22 : 41] He grows a man. He fashions a man out of the ground. And from the man, the woman. And in their relating to one another, he creates Adam first, and then Eve.

No loss of equality, but in every way, they are his planting. They are his field. He put us in the field, but we are his field.

And we grow up like stalks. And when they are married one to another, they put on display. They display something about God. That the rest of the created order can't do.

Two equal creatures, as it were. Male, female. Who display something of the uniqueness of the Trinity.

Multiple persons, yet of one. So the wife then lives in deference to her husband, according to a design rooted in creation, which would display something about the character of God himself.

[24 : 04] He is disclosing himself to us through how he has made us. And in marriage, Christian marriage, we are now putting on display something about the relationship between Christ and the church.

That the wife is, in a sense, representative of the people of God who are wedded to Christ. So that she lives in deference to him as unto the Lord. This is so foreign to the world in which you and I live. And for some sense, I understand why it's so foreign. But Paul wants to say there's something beautiful here.

That this book of Ephesians, which is about God's vision for Christ and the church. This book of cosmic proportion.

As we've now arrived at a moment in the letter where this cosmic vision actually comes down underneath the lentil of our own homes.

[25 : 13] This thing about God who's doing something on reuniting the heavens and the earth actually matters at my own living room too.

This God who's reuniting all things actually cares about my home. And next week, my children. And the way I relate to others. I mean, this is amazing. This is what Paul would put on display. That the Christian wife has the unique privileged responsibility of representing to the world something of God.

I suppose that would be your, if you were a wife or a woman here, that would have to be the thing you'd come back to every day.

Dear Lord, may you help me. Because if this isn't putting on display something about Christ and the church, I really don't want any part of it.

[26 : 30] There's another thing here, though, that what Paul is doing is he's reorienting who Christ is for the church.

This word headship for the husband is the head of the wife. It's used in a very rare form back in chapter 1, verse 6, 1, verse 9, where we're seeing the mystery of God's will.

According to his purpose, which he put forward in Christ as a plan for the fullness of times. Here it is, to unite all things in him. This word unite actually contains the same word as heaven.

It's in Christ, God is, he is refashioning in a man what the first Adam lost.

It's what Irenaeus calls recapitulation. It's what I would call re-roofing. What God is doing in Jesus is he is re-roofing everything in creation under him.

[27 : 36] And when you actually get down to your own home and your own life in it, there's this re-roofing that's going on that displays the glory and the manifestations of Christ.

What about the husband? If the wife is living in deference by design in hopes of this glorious display, what about the husband?

Verses 25 to 31, They show what a spirit-filled walk of a Christian husband looks like who loves Christ and is in relationship to his wife.

Can I signpost this for you quickly so you can hold it in your mind? It's love and imitation and intention.

Love. Look at that. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Love. He doesn't ask you to exercise your headship.

[28 : 41] He asks you to exercise love. I mean, you think of Spurgeon who said, For Jesus has made even his divine power and Godhead subservient to our salvation.

His omnipotence, his omnipotence, his infallibility are all combined for our defense.

The same way for the husband. Jesus has even made his divine power and Godhead subservient to our salvation. Even so, any husband who has any notion that there's headship involved in any way, it is all to be directed.

It is all in subservient to love and saving acts. You're not called to exercise headship.

You're called to love. That's the proper exercising of whatever headship would be. So, men who are married, do you love as Christ loved the church?

[30 : 01] Do you direct all your energies toward her well-being? Do you refrain from all your purportedness for the purpose of her well-being?

Christ did it unto death. Christ did it unto death. So, stay at work. Too many men fall far short on verse 25.

My own marriage, I've been married now for 38 years this summer. And to this point, I would say that when things are dislocated in my marriage, if I'm smart enough and I'm wise enough and I'm careful enough, I acknowledge that if we have problems, they are my problems.

Not that my wife is my problem. They are that I am not yet what I ought to be. That the disruption in the waters of my own home can, at times, I've got to face this verse down.

Love. Love. But notice, it's love that is imitatio. It's an imitation.

[31 : 40] You love as Christ loved. It's a love by way of imitation. That the husband is to walk in his own home as Christ would walk in that home.

You lack control of your temperament, temper. Not so for Christ. You're short with others.

Not in any unrighteous way ever for Christ. You feel that there's things you just can't do. Wasn't that way for Christ.

And believe me, love is not simply about life. Men, men hear me on this. I'm getting old, so I'm going to say it. There's a difference between just doing life together and love.

Doing life together means you do the laundry. Means you wash floors. Means you do the dishes.

Means you get flowers. Means you get cards. Means you write notes.

[32 : 52] That's just life. Quit confusing that with love. Love is deeper, richer, more mysterious. Too many men think, well, I love my wife. How do you know you love your wife? I did the bills this month. Really? Give me a break. I don't care how you work out your bills. Just figure it out together. That's not what this is about. This love of Christ for the church is the total commitment of his entire being to her welfare, her protection, her joy, her flourishing. This isn't about you go to work and she stays home. Haven't you read Proverbs 31? It's the woman in Proverbs 31 that owns the field and is doing all the stuff. This isn't about 1950s leave it to beaver stuff.

Love is deeper. Love is stronger. Love is my life for yours. In imitation of Christ.

[34 : 09] Who was equal with God, but considered it nothing to be held onto, but condescended even to the point of death, death on a cross and becoming a model for us.

And notice it's not only by imitation, it's by intention. And with this, I begin to close. Look at the intention that the husband imitates Christ in love.

So that, that's a very important word, verse 27. So that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. That she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way you ought to do this. All the way down then to the very close where just we are doing it as Christ does the church.

What a mystery. I'm saying it refers to Christ and the church. The husband has the privileged opportunity in his home to represent Christ as he sets his wife apart.

[35 : 15] Only unto her does he give himself. Only unto her. As he lives in ways that wash this home under the word.

All in hopes that he would present her to the Lord. Everything you do as a husband is to present your wife in glory to Christ.

Therefore, that's why a man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife and the two. Shall become one flesh. Well, how do we shut this down?

This field is a, this text is a field. But I think there's seed here for a harvest.

May God have mercy. As we look to him. You know, in 1 Corinthians, you know, in 1 Corinthians, Paul says, in another place, you are God's field.

[36 : 29] So may we cultivate the soil of our own soul. Even in the way we orchestrate life under our own roof. In ways that would put on display how God is re-roofing the whole world.

Under the beauties and glories of his son. Our Heavenly Father. Now the terrain of the text. In our day.

Is difficult. The terrain of the text for some who are married here. Is made more difficult. By the behavior of their spouse.

So Lord, help us each one. To put on display what you would have from us. Nurture us. We pray in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.