

Fulfilled

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Preacher: John Rees

[0:00] The first reading can be found on page 1250, and that is Revelation 21, verses 1 to 14. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said,

Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Then came one of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away, in the spirit, to a great high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Having the glory of God, its radiance, like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal, it had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels. And on the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed. On the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

1-1-7-7 in Ephesians 5, we're going to read from verse 15. Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is, and do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always, and for everything, to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[3:47] 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 saviour.

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 splendour, 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. I'm 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. Jake, thanks very much indeed for reading.

[5:19] Let me add my welcome to Rupert's. My name is Simon Dowdy. I'm the lead pastor here at Grace Church, and it's very good to have you with us this morning. Why don't I lead us in prayer as we look at Ephesians 5 together.

Let's pray. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And we pray that as we look at Ephesians 5 together this morning, please would you indeed revive our souls, make us wise, rejoice our hearts, enlighten our eyes.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're picking up our series on Ephesians from where we left it off before Easter. And for those of you who have been with us through this series, then you'll know that at the very heart of Ephesians lies the great plan of God for all eternity.

[6:35] Just turn back to chapter 1, verse 10. This is God's declared purpose to which the whole of history is heading. Set forth in Christ, chapter 1, verse 10, as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

It is God's plan for a whole new creation, united under the rule of Jesus. And the Apostle Paul writes this letter so that we don't lose heart, but instead live in the light of his plan, confident that his plan is on track.

For many, I guess, though, that will sound as persuasive as saying that Theresa May's plan for Brexit is on track. So you say, how can we be sure?

Well, first, look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has been raised, chapter 1, verse 21, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Second, look at the church. Look at the church across towns and cities and nations as people from all different races, cultures and nationalities come under the rule of Jesus Christ, a foretaste of the new creation.

[8:09] As Paul says in chapter 3, verse 10, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Third, look at the lives of Christians. That is the focus of the second half of the letter, which begins chapter 4, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

And this week we see what that looks like in the area of marriage, next week in the areas of family life and the workplace. Now, I realize we're not all married, and yet it's vital that all of us understand God's purposes for marriage so that we can encourage those who are married because one day we might be thinking about marriage.

Well, may I say, if you're here this morning and you are looking in on the Christian faith, we're delighted you are here. Hopefully this morning you will see something of how very distinctive and how very attractive the Bible's view of marriage is and God's plan for Christian marriage.

Now, we'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. First of all, God's blueprint for a spirit-filled marriage. Ephesians 5.22 carries on from the previous section.

[9:44] The editors, I think, have done us no favors whatsoever by inserting a new heading, Wives and Husbands, between verse 21 and verse 22. Paul has been talking, the Apostle Paul has been talking about distinctive Christian living.

He sums it up, you'll remember, in verse 18, be filled with or by the Spirit. In other words, a life that is open to the transforming work of God's Holy Spirit.

What does that look like? Well, verse 19, it's a life fueled by the word of God addressing one another in Psalms. Verse 20, it's overflowing with thanksgiving to God. And verse 21, it's submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So as Paul goes on then to address wives and husbands, can we see it's a continuation of what it looks like to be filled by the Spirit? And at the heart of the biblical idea of submission is the idea of order.

In other words, God has established certain leadership and authority roles within family and within society. In 5:22 to 33 today, in marriage.

[10:58] Next week, 6:1 to 4 in family life. And 6:5 to 9 in the workplace. Elsewhere in the Bible, we're told that Christians are to submit to the governing authorities and to their church leaders.

And yet, of course, in our culture, the very word submission is like a red rag to a bull. And that is why we need to start at chapter 5, verse 31.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Ephesians 5:31 is the most fundamental statement in the Bible concerning God's plan for marriage.

It's the creation pattern from Genesis 2, verse 24. And yet, what's the surprise? Well, the surprising thing is how the Apostle Paul then goes on in verse 32.

This mystery is profound. And I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. In other words, way back at creation, it wasn't only marriage that God had in mind, but the relationship between Christ and the church, his people.

[12:17] Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, God pictures the relationship between himself and his people as that of a marriage. The Lord taking his people as himself to be his bride.

I put Ezekiel 16 on the outline. Do look it up later. And that relationship between God and his people in New Testament terms, Christ and his church, is then the blueprint or the template for how marriage between a man and a woman is designed to function.

So, did you notice, as Jake read for us, that throughout the passage, the husband's love of the wife is to mirror Christ's love for the church.

Did you notice that? Verse 23, the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church. Verse 25, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Verse 29, no one ever hated their own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church. Likewise, the wife's submission to her husband is to mirror the way in which the church gladly submits to the Lord Jesus.

[13:34] Verse 24, now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. In other words, God's whole intention at creation was not simply to create marriage as an end in itself but rather to create marriage as a picture or template for something that is based on rather God's relationship with Christ and his people.

So God creates human marriage that is to point to the relationship between Christ and his people, Christ and the church. It's the building site I've used before in Ephesians.

So you go to a building site, you talk to the developer and you look at this whole kind of rubble and this wasteland and you say to the developer, so you're going to build some development out of this mess and the developer says, yeah, that's right and you say, well, tell me what you have in mind.

I mean, it's hard just looking at all this stuff, this kind of wasteland. It's hard to imagine that you're going to put it off at which point the developer takes you to a show home.

It's going to look like this. Let me assure you, we are on track. Well, in just the same way, you see, when we look at our world and we say to God, are you really going to bring a whole new creation out of this mess?

[15:11] God replies, yes. Look at the church. as people from all different nations and cultures come under the rule of King Jesus.

That was Ephesians chapter 3. But now, in Ephesians chapter 5, God says, look at Christian marriages as husbands love their wives and as wives submit to the loving leadership of their husbands.

In other words, Christian marriage rightly lived is a foretaste of the future. It reflects where the whole plan of God is heading.

That's why we had that reading from Revelation chapter 21. Jesus Christ, the bridegroom, and the church, his beautiful bride. God's blueprint for marriage is as beautiful as the gospel itself. It points forward to the final day of history and the marriage of Christ to his people in the new creation. In other words, you see, we mustn't make the mistake of looking at Ephesians 5 verses 22 to 33 and dismissing what Paul says about submission and headship as simply being based on first century cultural values.

[16:39] That could not be further from the truth. truth. The blueprint for Christian marriage is not culture, but the relationship between Christ and his people.

Indeed, it seems to me it's most likely that in addressing wives before husbands and in the next section children before their parents and slaves before masters, the Apostle Paul is in fact being profoundly counter-cultural speaking to those who in first century society wouldn't be spoken to at all in public like this.

as he recognizes their equal status within the church of Christ. So that is our first point. If you are a Christian and if you are married to a Christian and if you are open to the work of the Holy Spirit in your marriage, this is the blueprint you will seek to follow.

Secondly, the spirit-filled wife and then after that we'll think about the spirit-filled husband.

Verse 22, wives, submit your own husbands as to the law. The word submission lands, doesn't it, with an awkward thud in our culture. We associate it, I guess, with words such as inferior or defeat or subjection.

[18:02] all of them overwhelmingly negative. It sounds like something from the 1950s, in fact, rather like an article I came across written in the 1950s, encouraging wives to think carefully about how they should prepare for the homecoming of their husbands at the end of a day's work.

Let me tell you what you might have done if you were a 1950s wife following the advice of this particular article. You should put a ribbon in your hair and ensure that you're freshly made up. You should make sure the meal is ready. On his arrival, you should sit him down in his favorite chair and give him a drink and listen to him. What he has to say is more important than what you have to say.

Well, it sounds at best rather quaint and at worst dangerous. that is not what the apostle Paul has in mind.

Instead, in the Bible, submission is a beautiful thing. We've already seen, haven't we, it is part of what it means to be a spirit-filled Christian, a desire to submit to those God has put in authority over us.

[19:23] What's more, of course, the Lord Jesus himself submitted to his heavenly father. Just think of his words in the garden of Gethsemane as he prayed just before his arrest, yet not my will, but yours be done.

Submission is a beautiful thing. It is a godly thing. Jesus is fully God. He's fully equal with God. He's not in any way inferior to God the father.

And therefore, you see, here in Ephesians chapter five, the apostle Paul is in no way rowing back on what he says in Galatians chapter three, verse 28. I put that verse there on the outline.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Wives and husbands have equal dignity, but different roles.

Submission is not a dangerous thing, it is a beautiful thing. Verse 23, 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.

[20:33] Submission is saying, I will trust you with my life. I will trust you to make the right decisions. I will let you lead me.

I will put my life into your hands. Now, it is, of course, what every Christian has already said to the Lord Jesus himself.

And if you're a Christian wife, then your husband is your head, just as Christ is the head of the church. And you are to submit to the loving leadership of your husband, just as you submit to Christ. Submission is about honoring and affirming the God-given leadership of husbands. that, I take it, is why verse 22 says, wives, submit your husbands as to the Lord.

You see, because it's about recognizing the husband's God-given leadership. I think that's what over the page explains verse 33 and the phrase, let the wife see that she respects her husband.

[21:42] Is Paul now sort of giving ground on submission and kind of rowing back on submission? And simply saying, well, actually, you can just respect them instead. Well, I don't think so, because the word that's been translated respect, in fact, means fear.

In the same way that it's used in verse 21, out of reverence for Christ, not fearful, but there's a sense in which there's a right fear for the God-given role that the husband has, a reverence for the place that the husband has.

witness. Well, you say, what else does this submission look like? Well, notice it's voluntary. In verse 25, when we come on to husbands, notice the husband is not told to make his wife submit.

It should not be enforced. It can never be an excuse for abuse of any kind. And if that's an issue for someone here, then please do come and speak to me or to Fiona Needham.

This is a voluntary and joyful submission which responds to Jesus. Notice verse 24, it is to be in everything.

[22:57] It's a word that means in every area of life. I take it that's saying no to resentment or manipulation or stubbornness. I take it it's saying yes to supporting husbands as they seek to lead.

It doesn't mean she always has to agree with him. After all, part of her honoring and affirming and supporting his God-given role will be to question him when he is wrong.

Although I take it that ultimately it will mean making him make the decision and taking responsibility for it. Notice there are limits to submission.

That little phrase, verse 22, as to the Lord, shows not only the motivation for submission but also its limits. If her husband is leading her into sin or if he is encouraging her to do something contrary to what the Lord Jesus would have her to do, at which point she needs to explain why she will not do it.

Nor notice does this pattern for marriage establish certain stereotypes of what we might regard as masculine or feminine behavior. For example, the Queen is well known, isn't she, for being an excellent mechanic.

[24:16] No doubt if she wasn't the Queen, she would be in charge of vehicle maintenance in her household. I can think of plenty of Christian marriages where the wives are more capable when it comes to dealing with the finances or where he's a better cook or where she is able to earn more money.

the Spirit-filled wife. Let's move on and think about the Spirit-filled husband. Verse 25.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Now, it seems to me that when our culture puts men and authority together, those two words, men and authority, put them together, there are so often out there two pictures which immediately spring to mind.

One is the rather domineering figure who makes all the decisions himself, who issues commands, who suppresses his wife and so prevents her from flourishing. The other is the weak figure who completely fails to lead and to act on his God-given responsibilities.

And therefore, it may, I guess, be rather surprising as we read what the Apostle Paul has to say here to Christian husbands, that actually they are not told to rule their wives or even to exercise leadership.

[25:41] Yes, they are to lead, and yet the Bible has a radically different view of what leadership looks like. It is a four-letter word.

L-O-V-E. Not the kind of sentimental Valentine's Day love that we see in the movies, but a love patterned on the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The kind of love that was seen on the streets of North London last year when two friends were ambushed on a petrol forecourt by a gang of young men. One of them, Jonathan Phillips, shielded his friend from the attackers.

He was himself stabbed in the process, fatally so, dying in hospital three days later. Now, that is the kind of laying your life down for your wife, love, leadership, that husbands are to demonstrate towards their wives.

Why? Because it's the way Jesus shows his love for the church. You see, that's asked the question, how does Jesus love his church? Look at verse 25.

[26:51] He loved the church in the past by giving himself up for her through his death on the cross. While we were still sinners, he took the initiative. He loved the church selfishly, sacrificially, willingly.

How does Jesus love the church? Well, in verses 26 to 27, we see the future focus of his love. Verse 26, 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.

The spot and wrinkle have nothing to do with physical perfection, but being presented before the Lord Jesus on the final day in the new creation. Someone asked me the other day what I thought about ambition being ambitious as a Christian.

Is it a good thing to be ambitious as a Christian or not? And I replied that it seems to me it rather depends what we're ambitious for. Husbands, Jesus is ambitious about seeing our wives presented before him spotless and blameless on the final day.

That's the thing that should fill our ambitions. Be ambitious for what the Lord Jesus is ambitious about.

[28:25] How does Jesus love the church? Well, he loves the church in the present. Verse 29, he nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church. Jesus tends and cares for his church.

Husbands, your love of your wife is to merit the watching world, the costly love of Jesus, sacrificial, servant-hearted, selfless.

You are responsible for her spiritual well-being and development. Now, we all need to work out the details.

I put a couple of questions there on the end of the outline, one for wives, one for husbands to help us to work out the details. What might it look like for husbands? Well, I guess it may mean taking your wife a cup of tea first thing in the morning so she can read her Bible and pray at the start of the day.

It may mean ensuring that you've got a babysitter organized and you're back from work in time to get your growth group together. It's one reason we don't have separate groups for men and women at Grace Church because we want husbands and wives to go together and to be on the same track, spiritually speaking.

[29:44] It will certainly mean taking the initiative to pray together. It may mean changing the focus of your ambitions for life or your ambitions for your marriage.

If your ambition in life primarily focuses on your career, and I take it that will be the case for a number of the men here this morning, then actually you are selling your wife and yourself and the Lord Jesus short.

The absolute focus of your ambitions for your marriage should be that future day when she stands before the Lord Jesus in the new creation, the priority, her Christian growth and nourishment.

Let me finish by saying a few words to those who aren't married. Some who aren't married will, of course, be married one day. And I take it that Ephesians chapter 5 shows the sort of person you should be aiming to be and the sort of person you should be looking to marry.

If you are unable to submit to his lead, don't marry him. If you're unwilling to love her in this way, as Christ loved the church, then don't marry her.

[31:04] others will never be married or will never remarry or perhaps are unhappily married.

At which point, I guess, the great temptation is to look at others and be full of regret and feel I'm missing out. But be assured that if you belong to the Lord Jesus, the perfect wedding is still awaiting you in the new creation.

Which also means, of course, that for those of us who belong to Jesus and are married, actually the ultimate marriage, the perfect wedding, is one that we are still waiting for and is still to come again in the new creation.

Why don't we spend a few moments in quiet and reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer and then we can have time for questions if people would like to ask questions.

this mystery is profound and I am saying that refers to Christ and the church.

[32:24] Heavenly Father, we praise you very much for the way in which you have so designed marriage to point to the beautiful relationship between the Lord Jesus and his church.

Thank you for that future day in the new creation, that future marriage, so to speak. And we pray, Heavenly Father, in a world which thinks so very differently and has turned its back on you.

We pray, please, all of us, would you help us to keep our eyes fixed on that future day. We pray that you would strengthen Christian marriages such that they would indeed reflect this biblical pattern.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33:34] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.