

# 1/26/2020 - Ephesians 5:21-33

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Odo. You can find help more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). There are some weeks when you come to a passage of Scripture that you feel a little bit overwhelmed by it. There's just a lot there that you could talk about for a long time. In fact, people have written books on this passage. Tim Keller has written a great one called *The Meaning of Marriage* that is a good place to start. And this is one of those passages that there's a lot of different ways to look at things. And so I want to encourage you, if you have questions or thoughts, things that aren't clear that you don't understand, write in the bulletin, there's a text number. You can text a question. I would love to be able to interact with that after the service. What we will do, as is our custom, we have about, after the service, we have what's called the Pastor's Forum where we regather in here to give you the opportunity to work through things that I might have said that are confusing or challenging or things you'd love to ask some questions about or think further through.
- [ 1 : 1 9 ] So I'd love to invite you to take advantage of both of those things. All right, give your attention now to God's Word from Ephesians chapter 5. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 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.
- [ 2 : 4 8 ] And 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. Amen. This is God's Word, and I want to remind you that He gives it to you because He loves you, and He wants you to know Him. This mystery is profound. This mystery is profound. Yes, anybody who has been married for any length of time recognizes that marriage is often a complete baffling mystery. One of the things I get to do a lot as a pastor is I get to do premarital counseling, I get to do weddings. It's probably my favorite part of the job. I love doing weddings. Occasionally, I get these young, dreamy-eyed couples, and I get to sit down with them.

It really almost doesn't matter what I say. It's just flying right over their head. They're just engrossed in this other person. I saw one of these dreamy-eyed couples recently, and they've been married a couple of years now.

[ 3 : 57 ] The wife pulled me aside, and she said, I remember you telling me that you can't really grasp everything that I'm telling you right now, that you're going to be surprised by marriage. You're going to be challenged by marriage.

It's going to be different than you think. And I just had no idea what you were talking about. And then we've been living this for a couple of years, and what I've discovered is it's way harder than I thought it was going to be.

But it's also way better than I thought it was going to be. It's like that in marriage. Marriage is a complete mystery to us sometimes.

What is the mystery? Paul says that it's a mystery. What does he mean when he says that? Well, what he means is that the mysterious aspect of marriage is in this very mundane relationship you have with another person, you reflect the eternal reality that God Himself has entered the world and is with us.

That a marriage of two normal people who get together and commit to one another for life, who experience joy and sorrow together, who experience intimacy, but also sometimes isolation, who experience a building of a life, but also sometimes the tragedies of life.

[ 5 : 19 ] That in that very normal relationship, eternity is somehow grasped. It's a mystery.

How in the world does that happen? But that's why Paul is using that language here in Ephesians, using marriage as an illustration of the great mystery of God.

I mean, remember, throughout Ephesians, Paul has been talking about the mystery of Christ being in his church, in the glory of Christ. He's used some pretty lofty language to describe this, you know, this gathering of human beings that we call the church.

He said that we, together, are the body of Christ. That Christ has no body but us. That we, together, are the reconciliation of God in the world.

That we have the resurrection power of God coursing through our veins. That you and I are set in authority over every power and principality that would stand against God in this world.

[ 6 : 28 ] And we look around and we're like, golly, like we're just kind of normal people. How can that be true? We're all just so normal. And yet, that's what God is saying is true.

That there's glory in the mundane. And that's the mystery. Marriage has the potential of illustrating that mystery. And let me just say this here. This is true for everyone.

Whether you are married, or whether you are not married, whether you long to be married, maybe whether you used to be married. It's for all of us in the church. Here's how it reflects that reality.

In marriage, we see the entire biblical story played out. God's beautiful and good creation. The tragedy of the fall into sin and death.

The power of redemption through Christ. And the beautiful hope of a full and final restoration. And that's just what I want to look at. This passage through that lens of the biblical story of creation, and fall, and redemption, and restoration.

[ 7 : 34 ] So let's just look at it that way. Creation. How does marriage reflect that part of the story? Well, earlier in the service, we read from Genesis, the account of God creating Adam and Eve.

And we didn't read the whole thing, but each one, Adam and Eve, are created with this dignity, with individuality, and uniqueness, with glory.

They are both said to be made in God's image. Male and female. They were given a job to do. Genesis 1 elaborates on this job a little bit, but it says that Adam and Eve were placed in this garden to be representatives, human representatives, of God's rule in the world.

They were supposed to keep the earth, to subdue it, to rule it, to care for it. They were caretakers of everything. And yet, Adam and Eve were different.

Adam was created first. Adam was the first one placed in the garden. He was the one to name the animals. He was the first caretaker of everything. They looked around.

[ 8 : 42 ] He and God looked around for someone who would be a companion for him, but they couldn't find anybody. Nobody fit. Nobody was suitable, so God made Eve second. Now, why in the world did God choose to make Adam and Eve at different times, and he chose to make them so different?

I mean, the differences between man and woman are not just superficial, you know. Woman is more beautiful, which is true. But it's something deeper and more profound that there is both a complementariness to them and yet a difference between them.

Why did God do it that way? I don't know. I don't know why he chose to do it that way. And that difference doesn't imply any sort of superiority, that men are not inherently better than women in any way, yet that difference in creation does point to different kinds of roles, different kinds of authority.

But remember now, God himself is united in his difference. He is one God, eternally one God, forever united in three persons, three distinct persons with distinct roles and responsibilities.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father creates and ordains all things. The Son accomplishes salvation. He is the one who is sent by the Father. And then together, the Father and the Son send the Spirit as our helper, as the one to enact, to be present with his people.

[ 10 : 16 ] They all three have different ways of exercising that authority. And yet, even though the three persons of the Godhead are distinct, that doesn't represent, none of them are diminished in their distinctiveness.

One is not better than the other. The dignity, the dignity and the union of Adam and Eve's relationship is written right into Genesis 2.

You know, Adam sees Eve, and he writes a poem. I mean, if he had a guitar, it would have been perfect. You know, this is now bone of my bone, it's flesh of my flesh. What he's saying is, she is like me.

She and I are one. And then it says that in future generations, a man will leave his father and his mother, he'll leave his home, and he'll give up something that he has there to go and to pursue and to find his wife and to build a new life with her.

That together then, that even though Adam has this unique authority in one respect, he's created first, he's the one first placed in the garden, that even though he has that, he's giving something of that up to go and to seek out his wife for them to together create a family in which they will work out their obedience to God.

[ 11 : 42 ] So in God's wisdom, why he set it up this way, I don't know, other than it just made him happy to do it, but in his wisdom, there is some sense of an order that is embedded in the creation.

That God is primary. He reigns and rules over all things. He's then given Adam some sense of authority as caretaker over all things, and then he brings Eve in to join with Adam so that together, the two of them would rule and reign in God's name over all of the created order, especially the animals, right?

God, Adam, and then Eve together, and then the animals. Seems like that would work pretty well. It seems to have been working pretty well for like one chapter.

And then things go so, so terribly wrong. Genesis chapter 3 that I mentioned a minute ago tells the story, you've read it before, I'm sure, about the serpent and the serpent lying to Eve.

You remember what the serpent convinces Eve of? that God's holding out on her. That God can't really be trusted. That what she really needs to do is figure out life for herself to make sure that she's cared for and to provide for her own well-being.

[ 12 : 59 ] And so she took the forbidden fruit, right? You see, the tragedy of the story, though, is that it says that she took the fruit and then she gave some to her husband.

There's an implication that Adam was just standing there watching her talk to the serpent. One great theologian says, it's the silence of Adam.

The silence of Adam. Where was he? Why didn't Adam show up that in her weakness he could have showed up and defended her? He could have taken a snake out of the tree or wherever he was and thrown him in the river or something.

Could have stomped on his head right there. He could have reminded Eve of what was true. Don't you remember? God is good. He does care for us. But Adam was nowhere to be found.

He didn't exercise the responsibilities that God had given him. And so together, Adam and Eve, Adam following Eve's rebellious plan, they together go and they go to God and they accuse God of holding out on them.

[ 14 : 08 ] Do you see what the biblical writer just did? They took this order of creation, animals, or God, Adam, Eve, animals, and he just flipped it on its head.

Now you have the serpent representing the animals who's telling Eve what is true about the world and about God. And Adam then is giving up his responsibility and following Eve's words and then together the two of them go and they try to exercise authority over God by telling him what he needs to do for them.

Do you see what just happened? The power of sin reordered the way that God set up the world. God, Adam, Eve, animals, animals, Eve, Adam, God.

See, this is what sin has done to the world. It has taken a world that was God's good creation and it's absolutely turned it on its head so that nothing works the way that it's supposed to work anymore.

And God tells them this. In Genesis 3, 16, God is talking to Adam and Eve and he says specifically to Eve. Listen to what he says. This is so good. He says, your desire will be for your husband but he will rule over you.

[ 15 : 29 ] And that word rule there is actually more like dominate. What God is saying is that the fundamental marriage relationship is now going to be one full of conflict.

It's going to be a battle for supremacy. For the wife, she is going to want her husband's affection and love.

She's going to want to be known and seen. Her desire is for him and she will use any means to capture that desire.

And what will she get in return? And he will rule over her. He will unjustly rule and dominate her because of his physical strength or whatever power he's got.

Do you see the conflict that's embedded at the very fabric of gender relations? In fact, I would argue that this passage right here explains the entire history of gender relations that you see in every culture of the world.

[ 16 : 37 ] The reason why we have problems between men and women in the world and abuse and injustice and oppression is not because we have the wrong model in creation but it's because sin has changed the very foundation of the world.

The very fabric of everything is messed up and it goes right back to Genesis chapter 3. Alain DeBaton is a writer he's a French writer and not a Christian and he wrote the most read New York Times article in 2016 you may have read this it was called Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person it was great and wonderful article and even as a non-Christian he picks up on this and what he talks about is that the true nature of a compatible happy relationship is that self-sacrifice is at the very center of it but you see the problem that began right here at the fall is that marriage has become and relationships have become a place that instead of giving towards one another it has become fundamentally how do I get my needs met from this other person and that's messed it all up good creation fall into tragedy is there any hope where's the hope of redemption well I think

Ephesians chapter 5 this passage that I know I've taken a long time for us to get back around to offers great hope I think unfortunately the passage we just read has been misunderstood and wrongly applied by all kinds of people on the one side on the more progressive side of things you have people who disregard this passage because it feels offensive to them you know it feels like it's more of the problem and I would respectfully want to argue that I don't think that they have seen this passage within the full scope of the biblical story as I'm trying to put it in that this passage is necessary because of Genesis chapter 3 that it's a different kind of vision than they might think that it is so that's one side of misinterpretation the other side of misinterpretation are the people who confuse the Bible's understanding of marriage of biblical marriage with traditional marriage you understand the difference between biblical marriage and traditional marriage by traditional marriage what I mean is some sort of enculturated it's something that looks like 1950s suburban

America you know the Bible equals 1950s suburban America that is not a right application of this passage at all because that vision of traditional marriage has far too often excused and tolerated abuse and tyrannical homes that's not the Bible's vision Ephesians 5 has something far more beautiful and redemptive because it shows that while husbands and wives are differently related they have complementary responsibilities from God it's something that matches what we saw in Genesis to the man God gives or Paul gives direction that he should have a sacrificial love love to the woman it talks about her she is to submit to that sacrificial love now this word submit just means to give up some measure of control to give over my agenda my agenda for myself in order to achieve the greater good now you'll notice in your passage just before verse 22 where it talks to the wife verse 21 which

I included in our reading says that we are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ that overwhelm that is kind of an umbrella over this whole passage and we are to give a there is a mutuality to submission that we are to give one another as Christians yet when we examine this passage Paul does give more specific language for the wife in terms of submission than he does for the husband what's up with that why is he doing that well let me say a couple of things clearly number one if you read chapter verse 22 it says wives submit to your own husbands it does not say to submit to all men the motive here that Paul is getting at is not to restrict women not to restrict their freedom in terms of society in terms of or to limit them into some sort of particular cultural expectations you know that's the idea of traditional marriage that I was talking about a minute ago you know women should only be in the home women are inferior to men in the workplace women are restricted in what they're supposed to do that's not the vision of

[ 22 : 02 ] Ephesians chapter 5 Ephesians chapter 5 is talking about the freedom that comes for both men and women in a marriage that is based on God's love it's freedom and the key to that freedom is actually what he says to the husband that the key is the husband's loving and sacrificial leadership did you notice that the demands for the husband are twice as long as for the wife twice as long or more far more in depth just look at the tenderness in the language he is to love her sacrificing himself for her to give himself up for her in the same way that Jesus gave himself up for his people he is to make her holy he is talking about cleansing her he is talking about presenting her as something without spot without wrinkle without any defect at all caring for her physical and spiritual good caring for her as well or better than he cares for his own body

I think that is a beautiful and strikingly difficult calling that Paul has given this man you see submission is simply the idea of following a husband's tender loving careful leadership see when I say that that this vision is a vision more about freedom than it is about restriction here is what I mean I mean that when we are loved well we become the people that God has made us to become let me say that again when we are loved well we begin to have the freedom to become the people that God has made us to become see the freedom or the redemptive vision for husband and wife is in that idea you know she she needs her husband to lay down his priorities in order to help her flourish in every way she he he needs her to build him up to strengthen him to become capable of fulfilling those caretaker responsibilities that in the world that God has given him one of my children had a school project this weekend they had they were talking about love and and they asked me you know what does it mean to fall in love and I gave a terrible answer but I was thinking about that this week and I ran across something that

Tim Keller wrote in his book The Meaning of Marriage and Keller talks about this he says maybe this is what it means to fall in love to see someone else and to recognize I see what God is doing in you I see where he's taking you and what you are becoming and I want to be a part of it maybe that's what it means to fall in love is to say I want to be a part of that thing that God is doing even if that means I have to sacrifice something to be a part of it so that's a redemptive vision good creation tragedy of sin the power of redemption what if this actually began to happen is there a restorative nature to this kind of vision I mean I've already said this kind of vision is so difficult because of sin and in fact as you look through the Bible if you go read the Bible you won't find a lot of great marriages they're just not there because they were sinners as well and if you look around the church you're not going to find a lot of great marriages

I'm sorry to disappoint you because we're sinners as well you know I think that I could persuasively argue that perhaps the central maybe not the only reason but the central reason for the dramatic decline of Christianity in America and in the West more generally could be drawn back to the failure of the church in our homes in Christian marriage see the church could be the picture of God's full redemption of the world that is coming one day freed when we will be freed from the tyranny of sin the church could be a picture of that the church could be the place where broken marriages are healed and put right again the church could be the place where men honor and care for and sacrificially love their wives and that their wives joyfully respond to that love the church could be the place where we see glimpses of heaven right here in the midst of the country of sin and death that we live in wouldn't that be amazing wouldn't that be a mysterious thing that to gather up a bunch of really normal people in a really normal place like this you might get a glimpse of eternity but that's the hope that's what

Paul is setting out for us is that glimpse and what that means is there is a glimpse of eternity even in your marriage your marriage has the potential to reflect God's eternal love for this world no matter the problems of your marriage no matter the hardened habits that have been there for a long time no matter the coldness that you experience no matter the wreckage of sin that has disjointed your relationship see glory is more deeply embedded in your marriage than sin is sin because the glory of marriage predates your sin God created your marriage to reflect his glory and it is a far more powerful force than your sin and failure

[ 28 : 45 ] Natalie and I were watching this show the other night and it's just a show that has all these little vignettes about love and the one we were watching was about this kind of couple that was probably about my age they had been married for a while their kids were about to go off to school and they had realized that their marriage had just kind of become cold they become distant lifeless they were irritated irritated by one another there was nothing dramatically wrong it just was lifeless and they were both kind of ready to give up on it and in this one kind of turning point scene the wife identifies a particular way that the husband had sinned against her nothing dramatic just very subtle had subtly pushed her away and in this one moment the husband sees it and he acknowledges it and he owned it and he repented of it and she accepted that repentance and something new was born in that little act of repentance that little act of grace something new was born in their relationship relationship see the mystery of marriage reflects the wonder and the mystery of the good news of Jesus

Christ in this in another passage apostle Paul talks about Jesus and he says that though Jesus was God he didn't consider the power and the privilege and the responsibility and all the authority that he had something that he needed to hold on to but he humbled himself he became a man he made his home among his people he submitted to the power of sinful man and their tools of crucifixion and death tools that should not have had any hold over him he submitted himself to them and in his humility he was victorious God raised him up to new life and so he now rules over all things and what it says is that because of his good and gracious rule every human being now has the opportunity to submit themselves to his good gracious self-sacrificing rule and it's our great delight to do it see his loving and self-sacrificial leadership isn't a threat it's what we desperately have longed for you see that's the model both for marriage but that's actually the model far beyond marriage that's the model for every one of us whether you're in a marriage or you used to be in a marriage or you really don't want to be in a marriage or maybe you desperately want to be in a marriage but you're not yet for whomever we are you could be in high school or middle school this is the model for you and hopefully far away from marriage at that point this is the model for you see it's about more than just your marriage this is a passage that is about Jesus what we need to see is that God's love for us in his perfect self-sacrificial love of Jesus is showing us that God has sought us out for our good and he is now doing everything necessary to make you become the person that he has set out from all eternity to make you be he has a vision for who you're supposed to be and what he says is

I want in on this I want in on making this happen and I'm going to give you pictures all around you to remind you of that see when we take this Ephesians when we take this vision seriously what we see is that though it is mysterious and though it is often often clouded by sin in our own world and in our own communities and in our own marriages there's something deep and profound in it that has the potential to change you when you see God at work in this self-sacrificial way that we see just hints of in marriage it will change who you are and it might just change the way that you enter into or continue in your own marriage it has the potential to change it's a mystery it's profound amen let me pray for us our father this mystery is profound we don't know how to grasp a hold of it we pray that you would help us to see your vision for this world not our own because your vision is way better help us to hold on to that we pray in Christ's name amen