

Christian Marriage (Ephesians 5)

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[0:00] Amen. Father, we ask that the words from my mouth, the meditation of my heart, will be found acceptable! In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

You may be seated. Our signed New Testament reading is a little heavy.

Before we jump into it, I was wondering if you guys would indulge the preacher in one of his bucket list things that he's always wanted to do. One of the greatest orations for my youth.

Anybody that's my age is probably one of their favorite movies. The Princess Bride. Marriage.

Marriage is what brings us together today. Marriage, that blessed arrangement, that dream within a dream.

[1:29] And love, true love, will follow you forever and ever. So treasure your love. Have you the wing? Marriage is what brings us together today in this assigned text, at least.

Marriage is a fascinating and profound experience. A wedding will either make a hero or a villain out of an individual.

Today's text is also one of the most contentious passages in today's postmodern world.

I am specifically referring to the language regarding the submission of the wife to the husband in everything. I promise you this, though.

If Christ is at the center of your life, your marriage, and your church, you have no need to be scared of this text. It will no longer be a battleground for two spouses to wage war over.

[2:42] I want to thank Raymond because he already keyed in on a problem that we have with dealing with this text.

The problem is our reading assigned from the lectionary starts us at verse 22. Unfortunately, there are passages of this section, or interpretations of this passage from verse 22 are on, that have wreaked havoc in the life of married believers.

I have been party to several counseling sessions underneath other pastors with men who think that verse 22 is the only verse in the entire Bible.

And I've seen this several times, unfortunately, in my ministry. A man comes in the session and says, Verse 22, you need to tell her to submit and obey to me.

These men are small-minded, selfish, and wounded by their sin. Their view of the marriage relationship is to get all they can out of their wives.

[3:59] For them, the marriage is a battlefield, and their wife is their enemy. This is not the relationship being spoken of here by Paul. You see, when we start to pull verses out of the surrounding text and use them to fulfill our own desires, we strip them of the meaning and the power given to them by the Holy Spirit, and can no longer be viewed as the Word of God.

We must interpret these passages within the surrounding book. This passage is not focused on the individuals mentioned.

By the way, when we do that, when we say this is just about the husbands and just about the wives, it's usually the other party talking, right? It's usually the husbands saying, Fix my wife.

My wife saying, Fix my husband. And if we carry it on to the next chapter, it's usually interpreted by parents trying to fix their disobedient children.

It can't be focused on individuals, because think about how foolish this would be. Consider the number of people here today who aren't married. We have those here who are widowed or called to the state of singleness or have not yet found their spouse.

[5:29] Did Paul expect them to just check out when they came to this text? Are they second-hand Christians? Should we just dismiss all the single folks today with the children and have them get the coffee hour ready for the married people?

If you are familiar with Paul's teaching, you understand this is not the case. You see, he's talking about marriage in a broader context, not just in a broader book, but within the body. Because marriage is a call. It is a ministry. It is a gift of God for the people of God, the church. This is a key point to understand.

Just as it is wrong for a husband or a wife to view their marriage as a means to satisfy their own personal desires, it is also wrong for the couple to view their union as an island unto itself.

The Christian marriage represents two people who are joined together to serve Christ within his church. Now we must consider the themes of this epistle.

[6:45] We're going to cover five chapters in three minutes, so hang on. Paul begins writing of our precious Father who calls us into adoptions as sons and blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Paul tells us that this is a divine rescue mission, that we have been saved from the course or the path of the world that leads to destruction.

Being made alive in Christ and eternal heirs, we must no longer walk as we once did. Paul prays that the church will walk in the power of the Spirit so that Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith.

To that end, we must no longer walk or act sensually, greedy, impure, carrying out the desires of our bodies and guided by the passions of our flesh.

By the way, look to any broken marriage and you will see these seeds behind it. So, moving on to verse 4, we are told then to walk, or chapter 4, we are told then to walk in unity and submission to our Lord.

[8:03] If you are a follower of the King, you must be obedient to the King. In Ephesians 2, chapter 21, we are told that we, all believers, cease to exist to ourselves and are now made part of a structure, a building, a temple, knit together with Jesus as our foundation.

So, don't come to today's reading and ignore the rest of the book. Looking to verses 20 to 21, we clearly see that before wives are given the instructions to submit, we are told to each one as members submit to each other.

And, furthermore, we are told to do this not out of fear of each other, but fear of Christ as Lord, because He is the one who bought us with His blood.

You see, there is a reason that submission is such a dirty word when it comes to the wife. It's because we are all allergic to it in the church period.

It isn't a wife problem, it's a church problem. None of us wants to submit to anyone. We carnally come to church the same way the carnal husband I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon does.

[9:36] We come to see what we can get out of it. Don't miss the flow of this text. Paul's command is for the church to submit itself to each other's needs, and then he moves on.

The first example he gives of this, the pattern of submission, which is an example and a grace for the whole body are the married couple. And the first party called out as an example is the wife.

And my sneaking suspicion is that the wife is named first because women are the best examples of Christ-likeness in this arena. Let's look at verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is 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. The manner or attitude or way in which a wife submits to her husband is not different from the call given to every believer.

[10:51] So it's her attitude, her way of doing it, does not differ. What's different in being called out here is who she submits to.

So in other words, what I'm trying to say is the pattern of behavior present in wives is expected from every believer.

The husband serves as the head of the marriage union and submitting to the husband, the wife worships the Lord Jesus. Even when that husband is a fool and a liar.

Now this issue of submitting in everything in Greek means submitting in everything. So there's no grammatical out I can give wives here.

But it means in every area of life, not every micro decision made. My wife is not expected to call me when she's out shopping to see if she's supposed to buy 2% milk or skin.

[11:55] It doesn't mean but the fact that the wife is called to submit to the husband everything means that she is exclusive to him.

It is a special partnership and it excludes all others. In other words, if my wife is called to submit in everything to me and Paul is pointing this fact out here, that means she is not called to submit in everything to you.

And this submission points to the presence of Christ in the marriage, his lordship over the church and the church's obedience to her one master. And we all submit in everything to someone.

Deal with some frank issues today, the wife is called to submit to her husband in the realm of sexuality exclusively to her husband. But is she alone in that calling?

No, no, no. we are all called to submit in this area to our lord. In submitting herself to the husband, she forsakes all others.

[13:18] She chooses not to walk on the path of immorality or that of destruction. She follows the new course being talked about in Ephesians. The wife cannot even entertain the idea of pursuing other partners.

there will be no other love or welcome if she is to remain obedient to Christ. But she serves as the first example of submission.

What is good for the goose is also good for the gander. The husband cannot seek out new partners, new girlfriends, cannot view pornography, cannot be sexually immoral and remain faithful to his calling in Jesus as Lord.

And what about the singles in the church? Their submission to Christ follows the example of the wife, although their faithfulness is a little more direct. They submit by remaining sexually confident, refusing to pursue moral activity outside of the marriage.

Paul moves on to the husband, and he has a little more to say to the men. It has been observed by some Bible teachers that this may be because men have a harder time accepting this teaching, and I tend to agree.

[14:37] You see, when a marriage occurs, two people die. Something new emerges. When I married Corleen, I ceased to exist to other women.

But my client was not one to just be taken off of the market to die from the desire of other women, but I was called to die to my own desires. I now live to serve her with the end goal of our mutual sanctification.

Look at verses 25. 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 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. We cannot miss the call of the gospel in the ministry of the husband. In another book, Paul writes, I am crucified with Christ, is therefore no longer I who live, but Jesus who lives within me.

[16:16] The husband dies to his own knees. It's something I've had to learn as a husband.

You never think, when you're a kid, I can remember back to the point in my life where my mother would cut up my food for me. And if she didn't cut my pork chop up quickly enough, I can remember getting really upset.

Now I've come to the point in my life as a husband and a father where basically by the time I get to eat, we're almost to the leftover stages because the locusts have descended and decimated it.

I've had to learn to die to my own needs. The husband is a protector, yes, but he is also the nourisher, the instructor.

In this way, the grace of God pours into the family. The husband is the pastor of the home. This leadership requires sacrifice.

[17:26] And let me ask you this, if the woman is committed to submission in everything, all areas of life, to the husband, how many areas of the husband's life must be submitted to the needs of the wife?

There is a real danger from both sides of the marriage when they reserve an area of their life from their partner, from their spouse. Husbands and wives give up privacy.

There is no room for private finances, private sexuality, private leisure, or private spirituality. You have become one flesh.

You are in this together. husband, what role is the wife?

This cannot be done in one's own power. This is done through the power of the Spirit and by the washing of the water of the Word of God. Husbands, what role is the Bible playing in your relationship with your wife?

[18:41] Do you worship together? Do you read the Bible together? Are you praying together? Is the Bible ever on your mouth and part of your conversation?

Let me confess to you now that as a husband, I fall short in this area and I can do a better job loving my wife in this realm. I need to love her more like Jesus loved the church.

church. And this pattern of submissions will be picked up by every church member here. Church is not a private experience. You can't check in to get your fix on Sundays.

Too many times the church is thought of in the terms of personal benefit. How can one be knit together into God's spiritual temple with this kind of attitude? You can't do that without submitting yourselves to one another.

And to avoid sounding like a Puritan, being a husband does not stop with dying to one's own needs. Married people, remember your baptism.

[19:48] Remember that if you were buried with Christ in his death, you will also be raised with him in his resurrection to newness of life. The husband dies, the wife dies, they emerge one flesh.

A new thing. In the pilgrimage of marriage, we discovered the brutality of life. I did not realize how hard marriage would be when I entered into this.

It's not just the relationship, it's the trials you endure together. And those of you who have been married longer than me, even more fully realize heartbreak.

Scrambling to make a living or career. Illness. Trials of childbearing and rearing. Excuse me. Illness.

Death. personal and family tragedy, the list goes on. If I knew everything I had in front of me when I started in married life, I might echo the disciples in today's gospel reading.

[21:05] These words are hard to hear. But this calling was to be a disciple of Christ in my marriage, and every call of discipleship carries this burden.

And when I look back at my life, I see the blessings that were poured out onto this marriage far outnumber the sufferings. Anything that matters or is significant involves pain and suffering. So that one can gain a more meaningful reward. And here's what Paul is saying happens in marriage and by extension the church. That as the husband and wife are joined together as one flesh, Christians also are joined together in one body.

And some of these blessings start now. We don't see them all on this side of heaven, but we definitely get a taste. The smile of the baby, the joy of training a new child, and launching them out into the world.

Knowing that you have a partner out there that will watch your back. That's one of the biggest gifts I've had in my marriage. It's knowing that I have a wife out there who has my back no matter what.

[22:22] Companionship and friendship. Growing old together, just leaning into each other and benefiting from each other's strengths and holding up each other and their weaknesses. Being knit together as a couple into the fabric of the church.

Now, nearly everything, I shouldn't say nearly everything, I think everything I've learned about being a Christian husband came from one man, my father.

I know that not everybody can say that, but I've been blessed to have a very godly father. My father gives very little thought to himself.

Almost no thought to himself. Over the 37 years I've had the privilege of knowing him, I've watched him day in and day out give himself to my mother.

He did this through some very difficult times, through trials of health. My mother's had several serious health episodes that went on for extended periods of time. He was always there caring for her, not complaining, while working a full-time plus job.

[23:42] And he gave himself up to us as children, too. Even to this day, he's a little older, hopefully he doesn't listen to the recording of this.

Maybe he doesn't have the full level of energy that he used to, but I could call him at any point and say, hey, dad, my car broke down.

I'm three hours away. Will you come out and get me? He'll hop in, come get me, and rescue me.

But at the same time, he'll also call and say, hey, dad, I'm struggling with this Bible passage, and

he'll talk through me and work with it.

And he's given himself up for the church as well. My dad puts at least, I'm going to guess, 25 to 30 hours of volunteer work into his local church body every week, serving them.

See, these things aren't disconnected. You don't submit well in one area, your marriage, and then not submit well in the other. These things all work together.

[24:48] In other words, if the wife is struggling submitting to the husband, the husband is struggling submitting in his needs, submitting to his wife's needs and caring for well-being, he's not suddenly a model church member in the other area.

These things are all connected. And the thing about my dad is, when he got married, he didn't have this kind of reputation.

He was known as an alcoholic. He was known as a drug dealer. And he wasn't particularly industrious. In 1981, something happened.

He went to a concert and somebody gave him the gospel. And my dad died that day. Something else new walked out.

I got to know Jesus through the testimony of my father. And he continues to be that. That's what Paul is talking about here. He is someone that expresses the true love of Jesus to everyone around him.

[25:55] God. It started with my mother, but it's never stopped there. See, that's what I'm talking about, this grace that pours into marriage and spills out to edify the whole body. We close, as I did the rookie move of closing my book before I was done.

verses 31 through 33. We'll close with this as a prayer. Therefore, a man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

As Paul summarizes everything he said to this point. This mystery is profound. 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.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.