

Sacrificing Relationships

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of October 2004. The preacher is Tim Patrick.

His sermon is entitled Sacrificing Relationships and is based on Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 to 33.

Please do open now if you would, if you haven't already done so, the Pew Bibles, the black one to page 952.

Naomi just read to us the passage that we're going to hear tonight, but I'd really, really particularly tonight like us all to have it open in front of us. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be in everything to their husbands.

[1 : 1 1] How do you feel about that? You've got your Bibles open in front of you? It's really in there. It's one of the more unpopular or one of the less popular parts of the Bible, I think, for today's believers.

It could be a proof text, couldn't it, to support things like patriarchy, the oppression of women, sexism, outdated traditions of the church.

Surely, in today's church, in the 21st century, this teaching isn't really what the church is on about. Surely, when we think about Christian marriage, this isn't where we go now to find our model.

Well, tonight is the last of our three talks on romantic relationships. Two weeks ago we talked about sex, last week's singleness, tonight's marriage. And as Christian believers, people who follow the Lord Jesus and believe that the Bible is the Word of God, we actually need to take this text seriously.

This might grate against us. It might not be something that we feel good about listening to or reading or even thinking about living, and yet it's in our scriptures and it's for us.

[2 : 3 5] My hope is that as we look tonight at this passage and we think about it in its context in this letter to the Ephesians that the Apostle Paul wrote, and as we think about it in its context of...

Sorry, as we think about it in its context into our lives as Christian believers, I'm hoping that we'll see this text isn't as negative as it might at first appear to be. I don't think we're going to do anything to take the edge off it.

It's a hard and confronting teaching in some ways and sometimes scripture challenges us with things like that. But I hope we can see where Paul's coming from and that this is actually a positive word he has for us.

Well, in this letter to the Ephesians, Paul is writing in these last couple of chapters about the way that believers ought to live.

People who are following Jesus, who've accepted his free gift of salvation and eternal life, who have faith in his death for their salvation, this is how they should live. And part of how they should live is in relationships.

[3 : 44] And you'll notice if you just scan your eye over chapter 5 verse 21, where we started the reading, down to chapter 6 verse 9, there's a number of different relationships that Paul's talking to in this section of Ephesians.

It's not all about wives be subjected to your husbands. There's lots of other things in there as well, isn't there? If you look in chapter 6 verses 1 to 4, it's about the relationship between parents and children.

Chapter 6 verses 5 to 9, it's about the relationship between slaves and masters. And then there is our section on husbands and wives. Relationships. How do we have these various ordered relationships given that we're followers of the Lord Jesus?

Well, the first thing that kind of covers the whole section, if you like, is verse 21. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. That's the heading, if you like, for this whole section.

Be subject to one another. And it means something like, fulfill your duties to one another. You see, even though all Christians are equal before God, and all Christians have a profound unity in Christ, still, within God's ordered creation, there are ordered relationships.

[5 : 06] There are relationships where Christians have different roles. In a lot of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul's been arguing for unity between Jews and Gentiles, where there was a great divide.

And he says, no, no, no, in Christ, we're all one, we're all equal, we're all on the same footing. That's part of the miracle of what Jesus has done. And yet, still, there are some distinctions in the roles that different Christian believers have in their relationships with one another.

And what Paul wants these believers who are unified in Christ before God to do is to behave appropriately to their God-given roles.

Children, he says, should obey their parents. Children and parents are equal in God's sight, and yet, in the roles they're in, children should obey their parents. Slaves and masters.

Slaves should obey their masters. They both have the same master in heaven, and with him there's no partiality. Chapter 6, verse 9 tells us. That is, in God's sight, slaves and masters are equal, and yet, in this life, they have an ordered relationship that requires the slave obey the master.

[6 : 20] Wives be subjected to their husbands. Wives be subjected to their husbands. Verses 22 to 24.

Paul now begins speaking particularly about the marriage relationship. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the saviour.

Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also, wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. What does this mean? What does it mean to be subject to your husband if you're a wife?

Well, I think a significant part of what it means, or a significant point to understanding it, is in verse 22, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

It means fully, in every way. That's what verse 24 says as well, isn't it? Wives ought to be in everything to their husbands. To the degree to which a Christian believer is subject to Jesus, that is the degree to which a wife ought to be subject to her husband.

[7 : 28] How do you feel about that? It's not an easy teaching in our cultural context, is it? We find it hard. Well, it's there, and we need to deal with it.

And I want to ask a couple of questions about why we might find it hard. First question I want to ask is this. Do we struggle with the whole idea of being subjected to anything?

Is that just so counter-cultural to us that we can't handle it in any context? Our culture doesn't like people being subjected to other people, people being in submission to one another.

Our culture likes to say that the number one spot is always reserved for us. Right? No one has got the right to be the boss of me. No one's got the right to be my head, my ruler.

No, no. I'm the boss. That's why so many people aren't Christians. Because so many people think, God's not the boss. God's not the head of the church. I'm in charge of my life. Our culture reacts against that.

[8 : 31] And what it does is it picks up on our pride. It picks right up on our pride. Our pride that tells us we are the most important thing in the world. And not only that, it's manifested in the fact that we don't subject ourselves to anyone or anything.

Well, occasionally you come across people who don't have that pride. I met a minister sometime last year. He's an assistant minister at a church overseas.

He's quite skilful and gifted. He says he never wants to be a vicar. He says he's found his role as an assistant. He wants to stay there and be a faithful assistant. He doesn't always agree with the decisions that his boss, the vicar, makes.

But he says, OK, he thinks he's found his role as the assistant. I had a friend at work when I worked down in Clayton. And he was a very gifted person in this workplace.

We were scientists. We worked at the CSIRO. He was an excellent scientist. And he kept, people kept wanting to bump him up. And he said, I don't want to be bumped up. I'm happy in this job. I don't want to climb the ladder.

[9 : 45] I've found my place and I'm happy to have my management sit above me. My ambition is not to scale the corporate ladder. But these are a couple of guys who I've just been impressed by their lack of pride.

They don't have the sense of it's about me being number one. Pride is a real issue. And it might be that in the case of husbands and wives this is not your issue.

You might think, no, it's not pride. That's not why this grates against me. That's OK. That's fine. But I wanted to raise it because I think pride creeps in in so many parts of our lives. And I just want to flag that as something to ask ourselves honestly.

How do we feel about being subjected to anyone, to anything? How do we feel about being subjected to our bosses at work, to the Victorian education system?

How do we feel about being subjected to our parents? How do we feel about being subjected to Jesus? Do we just struggle with that because of our pride? Maybe, maybe not.

[10 : 47] But please, think carefully about it. Pride taints a lot of healthy relationships. Well, perhaps pride isn't the reason that we struggle with this passage. Perhaps it's fairness.

Perhaps you think, why should a wife be subjected to a husband and not a husband subject to a wife? Or, why can't the husband and wife decide between them which one will be subject to the other one?

Or, why can't they just agree to be both equally the head of each other and subject to each other? That seems fair and democratic and everyone's happy. Well, they sound like great ideas to me.

the problem is that's not what I find in the Bible and I have to struggle through that. In God's wisdom, he has ordered his creation and he's given human beings different roles in their relationships.

In the case of husbands and wives, it seems that the roles God has assigned to each is related to their gender. Men and women are different, obviously.

[11 : 56] And God has, in the case of the marriage relationship, let the gender difference lead to a role difference. It's not just biological, although it is biological.

A mother can breastfeed a child because mothers are different to fathers. A father can't breastfeed a child. I didn't even bother trying. But it's more than just biological.

God has set men and women into different roles within the marriage relationship. relationship. Please note, in God's wisdom to do this, to set up different roles in the marriage relationship, this is nothing to do with men being better.

And this is nothing to do with women being second rate. Not for a minute. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. But the headship that the husband exercises is a role in that family.

Not to do with him being superior to the woman. The Bible actually doesn't talk about women being inferior ever. Women are highly regarded.

[13 : 02] And you only need to read through the Gospels and see the way that Jesus interacts with women to see in what esteem he holds them. And how much Jesus breaks all the social rules to reach out and care for and love and honour women.

But in doing that he doesn't overturn the social order. In God's eyes slaves and masters are of equal worth and yet they have different roles.

Parents and children are of equal worth and yet they have different roles. Husbands and wives are of equal worth but have different roles. And as people who love the Lord Jesus and who want to follow him we need to live by the roles that have been created for us.

Now perhaps you don't mind the idea of wives being subjected to husbands in an ideal world. But perhaps you've seen too much marital abuse to think that this is safe or wise anymore.

Perhaps you worry that if a woman is subjected to her husband she's sacrificing her independence and exposing herself to abuse. it's sadly true that some marriages see abuse.

[14 : 20] It's sadly true that some husbands distort headship and abuse the wives they should love. But this is a great evil.

This is wrong. This isn't the model of headship that we should be reacting against. Being subjected to the husband as to the Lord isn't meant to be a negative idea. It's in fact meant to be a blessing.

It's meant to be a good thing. In the same way really as being subject to the Lord Jesus himself is a great joy and blessing. You see if you're a Christian you're subject to Jesus.

But do you think of that as a horrible thing as a negative thing? It's a great great blessing to come under the headship of Jesus. And Paul says here wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

When Christians are subjected to Jesus they're not at risk because Jesus is the loving serving head of his people. He loves with an immeasurable love.

[15 : 24] And this is the same way that husbands are called to exercise their headship in love not in abuse. Wives are not called to submit to their husband's authority. Wives are called in fact to submit to their husband's love.

Christian wives do need to learn submission I think this text leaves us no way around that. All Christians need to learn submission, need to learn how to be subject. And we need to come to terms with any struggles we might have with the fact that the Bible talks about the husband being the head of the wife as God has ordered the marriage relationship.

But we also need to try and understand this in the positive light it's meant to be understood in. it's similar to coming under the loving headship of the Lord Jesus. Well with that in mind Paul moves on then to address husbands.

It's interesting he has a lot more to say to husbands than he has to say to wives. And you'll notice that all the relationships that you see from chapter 5 through chapter 6 they're always two way responsibilities.

The masters have as much responsibility toward their slaves as the slaves do towards their masters. The parents have as much responsibility towards their children as the children do to the parents.

[16 : 39] And the husbands have as much responsibility to their wives as the wives do to their husbands. Paul has strong words for husbands here. Words that I actually find a great struggle.

Paul says that husbands have to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Verse 25 and gave himself up for her. And then going on in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word.

So as to present the church to himself with splendor without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind. Yes so that she may be holy and without blemish. Husbands are meant to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

This is not just an emotional thing. It's not just a husbands feel romantic towards your wives. Husbands buy your wives flowers once in a while. No no no. This is extreme love.

Love born out in action. Sacrificial self-giving love for her benefit. Sacrificial love to the extent that Jesus loved the church.

[17 : 49] That extent Jesus loved the church so much he died for the church. husbands have to love their wives to the same extent. Be prepared to die for her.

Love that goes all the way. Again it's not just about how much. It's also about to what end.

The notion again isn't just romantic. It's not just love her till you want to pop. love your wife to the point of death as Christ loved the church.

And for what reason? Not to deliver your wife from every hardship. Not to offer her a fairytale romance. But in order to make her holy.

To have her presentable without spiritual spot or wrinkle or blemish. This is what Jesus' life was all about. Presenting the church holy. and clean.

[18 : 49] He took all the mess away from the church. Died on behalf of the people of the church so that the people of the church could be clean. And this is the sort of love that husbands are called on to show for their wives.

Husbands should be prepared to do anything to keep their wives holy. To the extreme extent even to die for them. For the ultimate goal. For their purity before God.

So I have a question for husbands. how many of you make the purpose of your marriage to present your wives pure and cleansed? How many of you are prepared to die for the good of your wives?

How many of you help your wives in their spiritual cleanliness by helping them read and live by the word? God?

Verse 26 How much is your marriage about your wife's spiritual good? About her ultimate eternal good?

[19 : 56] And how much is it about your own selfish needs? it's so easy to think about what we get out of our marriages for ourselves and how they make us happy and how we get love and sex and all the other things that people said in the video commitment.

Lots of security, lots of things for ourselves. But how much husbands do you love your wives for their good? Husbands need to love their wives just to the same extent and for the same reasons that Christ loved the church.

Well as if this wasn't enough and a high enough charge on husbands, Paul gives another example of the way that husbands should love their wives like their own bodies. Look at verses 28 and 29 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies.

Husbands need to care for their wives as though they're their own bodies.

Here Paul's picking up on the fact that human beings by nature, even though we fail at a lot of stuff, even though we fall short in lots of ways, we tend to be pretty good at looking after our own interests, caring for ourselves.

[21 : 11] Most people intuitively want to look after their own bodies. By nature we look out when we cross the street. We seek medical advice when we're sick.

We try to look basically neat and tidy or maintain that cool scruffy look. We get something to eat when we're hungry. We drink something when we're thirsty.

It's our nature to care for our bodies. And people who don't do this have something wrong with them. And just as it's natural and instinctive for us to care for our own bodies, Paul wants husbands to care for their wives.

So another question for husbands. Do you love your wives the same way you love your own bodies? Are you well attuned to their needs? Do you feel all their pains? Do you notice all their problems and seek to resolve them?

Or do you put that stuff kind of to side and say, that's their stuff? Are you as concerned with your wife's well-being as your own? It's again, Paul brings this back to the way Jesus cares for us.

[22 : 20] At the end of verse 29, it's just as Christ does for the church. It's interesting, isn't it? Talking about marriage, Paul keeps bringing up the way Jesus relates to the church.

love your wives like Christ loved the church. Care for your wives like you care for your own body, which is what Jesus does. Why is this?

Why this strong link back to Jesus? It's a good illustration, but there's in fact even more to it than that. Look at verse 30, because we are members of his body.

That is, the church, the people of the church are part of Christ's own body. You see, the way Jesus loves the church is the way people love their own bodies, because Jesus' body is the church.

This is imagery we know well from Paul, isn't it? If you've been here for the last couple of months, we spoke about how the church is the body of Christ, when we looked at 1 Corinthians 12 a little while ago. And it's quite profound that Jesus considers the church an extension of his own body.

[23 : 32] And that's the degree to which Jesus loves us. In his death, Jesus gives the church a divine favour that really only God deserves. He substitutes his holy status for our impurity.

And this is being applied now to marriages. Husbands are supposed to love wives to this extent. It's a high call to have Christ-like love. These two strong images, love your wife as Christ loved the church.

Love your wife even as you love your own body. Which is again how Jesus loved the church because it's his body. These are high calls for the Christian husband. And I wonder how much we actually take them seriously.

I wonder how much Christian husbands actually live by those high, high standards. Well, after hitting us with these two incredible pictures of how husbands should love wives and how Christ loves us, we then move on to see something that's quite profound, I think.

Read with me, if you will, verses 31 and 32. Paul moves on after these two images to say this. He's quoting now from the Old Testament. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

[24 : 53] This is a great mystery and I'm applying it to Christ and the church. The first book of the Bible, Genesis, teaches us that the love that one has for a wife should be like the love one has for oneself because when a husband and wife join together, they become one flesh.

Incredibly now, Paul applies this to Jesus and the church. You see, the church is the bride of Christ. The church will be presented to Jesus, the husband, on the last day.

You can read about that in the book of Revelation. At the same time, through what Jesus has done by giving himself for the church, he's made a one flesh relationship between himself and the church.

The church is at the same time the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. This underlies so much of what we believe about our relationship to Jesus and to God.

Our salvation from sin is because Jesus takes on our nature. He joins us and he delivers us. Our eternal life is because we're joined to Jesus and with him we go through baptism and resurrection.

[26 : 04] The church is both the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. Please understand, this is talking about us. If you're a Christian believer here tonight, if you're part of the Christian church, you are the bride of Christ and the body of Christ.

Christ. We as the body of Christ share one flesh with our husband, the Lord Jesus. This is amazing in terms of our salvation and our relationship with God.

It's deep. We have an incredible close bond to God. Christian believers, part of the church together, are wrapped up in a sense in the very being of God through what Christ has done.

It's an incredibly deep unity. But the thing we have to note now is as amazing as this is and as much as we can get carried away about thinking about Jesus and our relationship with him, this is all coming in the context of Paul teaching us what a Christian marriage should be like.

See, this is coming in the context of Paul teaching a husband how to love his wife. It's incredibly huge. The magnitude of this love that a husband needs to show for his wife is almost incomprehensible.

[27 : 15] Our marriages are to mirror the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church, his body. Therefore, husbands are called to an unbelievably high standard of love for their wives.

Paul wants to use human marriage to help us understand divine marriage. And so he expects our marriages will be of an incredible quality as Christian believers. A husband must have sacrificial love for his wife, seeking her purity, not his own happiness first, and glorifying God.

Well, after taking us to that lofty height and setting the bar incredibly high, Paul then grounds us in verse 33, back where we began. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

husband. We've seen that although the call for a wife to be subject to her husband is a hard one, particularly for our culture, the call for a husband to love his wife is equally, if not harder.

We don't like the language of submission or subjection in our culture, and so we might find this passage challenging. And if you're a Christian believer who's married, or if you're a Christian believer who's single and thinks one day you might like to be married, this is something you need to work through.

[28 : 44] Please think about exactly why you find the idea of subjection so hard. Remember, it's not subjection to a dictator or an overlord. It's subjection to the loving Christian husband who you'll choose.

Nevertheless, we don't want to lighten the teaching. It's subjection that Paul calls for, not something less. The point is really that it should be more of a blessing than a burden, a great blessing.

What amazes me more than the fact that people struggle with ideas about being subjected, which I think are good things to struggle with, it amazes me that more people aren't overwhelmed by the challenge for Christian husbands that this passage shows us.

There's any number of arenas where you can go and talk about the nature of a wife's submission or subjection to her husband. But how often do you find husbands meeting together to work through what it means to love their wives like Christ loved the church?

Do they struggle with that? Paul uses Jesus' relationship with the church as its body, its head and its husband as a model and a reflection of Christian marriage.

[29 : 58] And there's a high call here for both husbands and wives. As we finish then, I just want to bring one more thing to mind. We've been thinking a lot about Jesus and I think Jesus is really helpful, as he so often is, to help us understand what it means to follow him, what it means to be a Christian person.

I'd like if you would ask you to turn the page in your Bibles to page 954. You'll find yourself in another of Paul's letters, the letter to the Philippians. And in this letter we can learn a little more from Jesus himself or about Jesus himself that helps us to learn both aspects of a Christian marriage.

We learn a bit about what it means to be the head. Let me read to you Philippians chapter 2 verses the second half of verse 5 through to verse 11.

It says this, Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[31 : 30] When we read that we see that in terms of subjection, Jesus was God's equal, but also fully subjected himself to God. If you want to follow Jesus and you're a Christian wife, you know you're equal to every other believer, but he's a model of subjection.

In terms of being the head, well, headship involves the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus died on a cross. If you're a Christian believer and a husband, your headship should involve sacrifice like Jesus did.

Jesus shows us both subjection and headship coming together in his own life and helps us understand what it means for ours. Being subjected doesn't mean being of less worth, it means fulfilling a particular role.

Being head doesn't mean being a dictator or oppressor, it means loving to death, loving even to death. And as Christian husbands or wives, we need to take carefully these teachings of the Apostle Paul and we need to work hard at following our Lord Jesus in our marriages.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you that you love us and that you want us to have great relationships.

[32 : 51] Thanks for saving us through the Lord Jesus and for teaching us how to live through the scriptures. We pray that you help us understand what it is to be subjected as Christian wives to our husbands and what it is to love as Christ loved the church and as we love our own bodies as Christian husbands to our wives.

Help us also not to treat these issues lightly, to turn away from them because they're too hard or to just dig our heels in and fight against them because we're too proud.

Help us in everything to submit to you and to be humble before you and to live our lives to your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.