

Christian Marriage

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[0 : 00] I'm going to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 5! As I shared with you in the previous sermon in this series, it's important for us not to miss how the Apostle Paul is concluding this letter.

You might remember that Paul began this letter by explaining God's gracious salvation towards sinners. He began by saying that before the foundation of the world, God chose those whom he would save and predestined them for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

And he goes on to show us how God then brought about this plan in time to save those whom he chose before the foundation of the world.

And Paul addresses how God not only reconciled sinners to himself, but how he reconciled them to one another in the church. And that brief summary is chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Ephesians.

And then starting in chapter 4, Paul begins to teach and describe how those whom God has saved are supposed to live as a result of the salvation that they've received.

[2 : 05] He starts with how we're supposed to live as a result of the salvation that they've received. He starts with how we're supposed to live in the church. How we ought to make every effort to walk worthy of the calling that we have received.

How we ought to make every effort to walk in humility and gentleness and patience. Bearing with one another in love. And eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And he urges us as God's new community to put off our old self of sin. And put on the new self of righteousness that's created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness.

And he calls us as God's people to walk in the light and to renounce the darkness. But in addition to talking about how we should live in the church as those whom God has saved, Paul also teases out what it should look like in terms of how we live in some other relational contexts.

He talks about how we should live in the context of marriage, husband and wife. In the context of the parenting relationship, parents and children.

[3 : 28] And then also in work relationships. And what he used in that day was the relationship between slaves and masters.

Which was the predominant work situation in that day. Well, this morning we come to consider the first of these three relational contexts.

Between husbands and wives. So please follow along as I read Ephesians chapter 5.

Beginning in 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 the head of the church.

His body and is himself its savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

[4 : 41] Husbands, love your wives. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That he might sanctify 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 he 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.

[5 : 46] This mystery is profound. And I am saying that it refers to Christ in the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself.

And let the wife see that she respects her husband. Let's pray together. Father, would you bless both the reading and the preaching of your word to the good of our hearts.

And in particular, to the good of our marriages. O Lord, help us all to hear and heed and to submit to your word.

And may you be glorified in the preaching of it. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm sure you'll agree with me that whenever marriage is talked about in mainstream media, it is rare, if at all, that the verses that we just read will ever come up.

In most of the discussions that we hear in the mainstream media about marriage, we hear about the importance of communication and the importance of sex and the importance of money in marriage.

[7 : 17] And while they are important aspects of marriage, they're not the most important aspect of marriage.

The most important aspect of marriage is for a husband and wife to understand and embrace God's purpose for marriage.

And it's not for children. It is not for happiness or mutual enjoyment of gifts like sex and companionship, as wonderful as they are.

Children and companionship and sexual fulfillment are wonderful gifts, but they, brothers and sisters, are not the purpose of marriage.

They are byproducts of marriage. They're not the purpose of marriage. And what should be clear as we talk about marriage this morning from this passage is that what is in view is Christian marriage.

[8 : 34] Marriage as ordained by God between one man and one woman. And in this passage before us, the Apostle Paul gets to the heart and soul of what Christian marriage is about.

And what he tells us is that Christian marriage is ultimately about Christ and the church and not about a husband and his wife.

And this, brothers and sisters, is the most important thing that husbands and wives need to understand and embrace in their marriage. Yes, in Christian marriage, husbands and wives are the beneficiaries of each other's love and care, but marriage is ultimately not about them and the love and care they receive from one another.

Ultimately, marriage is about Christ and his church. And that's what I pray that we see this morning from God's word.

And I especially pray that we who are married see this. This morning's sermon has three simple points and they are, number one, God's word to wives, which we see in verses 22 to 24, God's word to husbands, which we see in verses 25 to 30, and then God's word to both, which we see in verses 31 to 33.

[10 : 16] So let's begin with the first, God's word to wives. It's found in verses 22 to 24.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Think for a moment what it must have been like being a woman or a wife in the congregation of the Ephesian church when this letter first arrived.

So we come at this letter having heard it again and again in different contexts, and so most of us were familiar with what was coming next.

But imagine being a woman or a wife sitting in the Ephesian church when this letter was first delivered from the Apostle Paul.

[11 : 30] I want to ask for a show of hands this morning among the wives and the women, but if I was a betting man, I would bet that most of you, if not all of you, cringe when you hear these words or similar words spoken to wives in marriage.

Well, it might surprise you that the wives and the women who heard these words in the ancient world in which Paul wrote them, they had far more reason to cringe, and no doubt they cringed when they heard these words.

In the ancient world in which Paul wrote these words, women were not valued nor respected. And sadly, this was even true in the old covenant people of God in the nation of Israel.

We're told that part of the customary daily prayer that Jewish men and boys prayed was they gave thanks to God for three things. Thank you, God, that you didn't make me a Gentile.

Thank you, God, that you didn't make me a slave. And thank you, God, that you didn't make me a woman. In Jewish culture, women were despised and they were mistreated.

[13 : 13] They were chattel. They literally were property. They were no different from a goat or a camel, though they were different in terms of their biology, but they were no different in terms of the material nature of their existence.

They were property. They were possessed first by their fathers and then when they were given away in marriage, they became the property of their husband.

If you want to see two pictures of how women were treated and viewed in the ancient world, take some time and read the accounts in Genesis 19 and in Judges chapter 20 and you'll see heartbreaking accounts of how women were viewed and treated.

In ancient Israel, women had no legal rights. They couldn't testify in court. They lived at the mercy of men. And the worst situation for a woman was to be a wife because at least her father based on the blood relationship or her brothers based on the blood relationship may not be as ruthless with her.

But when given over to a man who had no biological connection to her and she became his property, and mainly an object of pleasure and an outlet to do chores, she literally existed every day at his mercy.

[15 : 04] And if things were that way among the people of God, you can only imagine what they must have been like among the other nations. Greek men saw and treated their wives as glorified house slaves.

They bore their legitimate children and took care of them and took care of the house. But Greek culture had no sexual boundaries and was a part of Greek culture to find sexual pleasure outside of marriage.

as I reflected on that, I thought, I don't think that we are as excessive as Greek culture was in terms of sexual pleasure, but we in our own way have adopted a culture of adultery which we have sanitized with the word sweethearting.

and it is so rooted in our culture that we can talk about it and laugh about it and joke about it without thinking of the horrors and the suffering that is behind it all.

In Roman culture, things were really no different. Fathers controlled their daughters and husbands controlled their wives and they were all property. They had no legal rights.

[16 : 36] And women and men were at the mercy of men. Some theologians say that the city of Ephesus was a little different in that it was a liberal city and that women, if there was a place for women's lib, if there was a place where women were pushing back against that, it would have been in Ephesus, but not to any meaningful extent.

Women and wives were mistreated and any freedom that they had came through rebellion and not through any recognition of the fact that women and men enjoy the same dignity and the same equality before God.

And so that was the setting in which these words in Paul's letter came to the Ephesian church. And Paul is calling these Christian wives who lived in a culture where there was mistreatment of women, where that was the norm, he's calling them to submit to their husbands in the most reverential way. He doesn't just say submit to your husbands, he says you to submit to them as you submit to the Lord. It isn't a free for all, you figure out what submission is for you, no, all of you women, he says, all of your wives submit to your husbands as unto Christ.

He's essentially saying to them, in view of your new life in Christ, in view of being members of God's new society. Submit to your husbands as the church submits to Christ.

[18 : 31] Submit to them not because you live in a culture that forces you to do so, but submit to them because doing so is in keeping with your new life in Christ.

exactly what does it mean to submit? It means to voluntarily bring oneself under the authority of another.

It is the recognition and acceptance of a role or responsibility that someone has in relationship to you and to bring yourself under that person.

And this is first a hard issue. Submission really is a posture of the heart before it becomes anything that is worked out in our lives.

So how do you think the wives who are hearing these words read in this letter for the first time were responding in their heart as they heard in the context of the world in which they live that they are to

submit reverentially to their husbands?

[19 : 56] I think human beings being who they are they're probably thinking how can we submit any more than we are already submitting to our husbands?

We have no rights. we are under their complete control and at their mercy.

And Paul knew all of that. And so what was he calling wives to do? He knew the reality of the situation they faced.

They were suppressed and they were oppressed and they accepted it. and they accepted it so they could survive, so they could have food to eat and a place to stay and not be harmed in other ways. But their hearts are crying out and protesting against such forced submission.! God would have you to do.

[21 : 29] You are to submit to your husbands as unto the Lord. And see, what Paul was essentially doing was Paul was bringing and calling wives back to the place that we enjoyed before the fall.

After the fall, things got distorted. After the fall, the natural inclination of a woman, as the Lord said in Genesis chapter 3, the natural inclination of a woman was to desire her husband's place of authority.

And he now is calling her away from that and calling her to submit to her husband in the same way that the church submits to Christ.

And look at the reason that he gives. he says in 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 his savior.

Paul is saying you do this because this is God's design. Not because you're forced to do it, but this is God's design. God has appointed the husband as the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church and is the savior of the church and you likewise are to submit to your husbands as the church submits to Christ.

[23 : 02] For that reason, it's God's good and wise design. And so in verse 24, Paul concludes and repeats the word to wives and how they are to relate to their husbands.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. In other words, this is the right and better reason that you are to submit to your husband.

Now here's the reality back then as it is now. No doubt there were believing wives who had unbelieving husbands. And were they being called to submit to their unbelieving husbands?

The answer is yes. They were being called to submit to their unbelieving husbands. Because again, submission is an attitude of bringing oneself under the leadership, under the authority of another, and it has more to do with respect than it does with obedience.

And so for example, if called upon to do something wrong by someone that you are submitted to, you can respectfully submit while disobeying.

[24 : 34] submission. Because submission is an attitude and the disobedience, not following that would be an action.

And so it is possible to maintain that heart of reverential submission while not doing something that you know is wrong to actually do.

that is certainly easier for a believing wife to submit to a believing husband. But God's word to all wives is to submit to their husbands whether that husband is a believer or not.

Now when you look at verses 22 to 24, in a sense you could really say, well, you know, Paul is finished. And if you were sitting in that original audience hearing this for the first time, you may have thought as a woman or a wife or even as a man, well he is finished.

He's already told the wives that they're supposed to submit to their husbands because the husband is the head of the wife. And that's their roles in marriage.

[25 : 52] Wives, you submit because the husband is the head. But Paul isn't finished. Paul has a specific word to say to husbands as well.

And if you think that the word that he gives to wives is a hard pill to swallow, in the ancient world in which they heard it, the word to husbands in the ancient world in which they lived, was an even harder pill to swallow.

And so let's now consider God's word to husbands in verses 25 to 31. In verse 25, we read, husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

And in this call, what is in view is the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ ran to the cross as an expression of his love for his people, that he might save them, and that he might do for them what they could never do for themselves.

He ran to the cross in self-sacrifice! to give up of himself that he might benefit his people, the church.

[27 : 24] And we see the reasons, the benefits of his self-sacrifice in verses 26 to 27. Again, these words came to Christian men who were living in a godless culture where men loved themselves and served themselves and sacrificed for whatever they wanted.

These words came to husbands, Christian husbands, who lived in a culture where women were property and where women were exploited and where women were abused by men and where women were viewed as less than men.

And no doubt some of the Christian husbands sitting in the congregation were treating their wives in the exact same manner. No different from the culture.

And so these words of instruction came to them in this culture where husbands are now being called to love their wives in a way that would have been scoffed at and laughed at.

Again, let's not forget this is a property. And that is the general way that they are viewed. And now you're being called to go against the culture and treat them with dignity and treat them with such value and such deference that you're willing to sacrifice for them.

[29 : 11] Indeed, lay your very life down for them. love your love your body.

But Paul isn't finished yet. He lays an even heavier call on husbands in verses 28 and 29. He says, Husbands, love your wives in the same way you love your body.

And he tells them, when a man loves his wife, he loves himself.

When a man does not love his wife, he's actually hating himself. And brothers and sisters, this is why when a man abuses his wife in marriage, it is so offensive and it is so wrong because it is in direct disobedience to the word of God.

Marriage is supposed to be the safest place for a woman to be. We have no command that a father is to lay his life down for his daughters.

[30 : 33] But a husband is called to lay his life down, literally if it comes to that. For the good of his wife. And when you consider that, the last place that a wife should be disadvantaged or abused is in marriage.

That is the place where she should be esteemed and she should be cherished and she should be nourished with a husband viewing her as himself. And see, Paul didn't have to go into a whole lot of detail about that.

It was a given that men love themselves. It is a given that we love ourselves. We don't need to learn how to do that. We come out of the womb knowing that.

You ever notice how the smallest child knows how to share a cookie and take the biggest piece? Don't need to be taught that.

The smallest child knows how to pursue his happiness and doesn't care about anybody else. Paul says the same way you care for yourself, husbands, you begin to care for your wives.

[31 : 55] And see, this is why I support a law that criminalizes forced sexual intercourse and marriage.

Because first of all, it's not going to affect Christian husbands. Because Christian husbands will not do that. Christian husbands will not impose themselves on their wives.

That's not loving your wife as you love yourself. And it is sad that men who are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church, need a law to protect their wives from them.

Brothers and sisters, this is the Christian teaching on marriage, that it is a union between a husband and a wife, and it is based on a husband loving his wife in a self-sacrifice, sacrificing way.

And so when a man mistreats his wife, he is doing that because he doesn't see her the way he's supposed to see her. He's not seeing her as a part of himself.

[33 : 14] He's not seeing her in union with himself. He's seeing her as separate and other, and therefore he can and will mistreat her in that way.

But when she's seen as in union with him, she won't be mistreated because to do that it will be almost like suicidal, like you have this thing about hurting yourself.

And normally when we hurt ourselves, we are not well. Well, husbands, we are not going to be as a husband. And so husbands, Christ sacrificed himself to make his bride, the church, what he desired her to be.

God calls us to have the same love we have for ourselves, for our wives. And when we do, there's nothing that we will do for ourselves that we will not do for our wives.

We wouldn't think it too much to do for our wives what we will do for ourselves. we have to nourish and care for them and cherish them and protect them as we do our own bodies in keeping with Christ's sacrifice.

[34 : 38] Christ's sacrifice is to be in view as we seek to be husbands to our wives on a daily basis. And so husbands, one of the ways that we can evaluate how much we love our wives is to consider what sacrifices we make for our wives or have made for our wives compared to the sacrifices we make for ourselves.

How do you serve in sacrificial ways, ways that cost you in some way or form? When was the last time you sacrificed for your wife?

I remember a number of years ago, I was driving. Well, some of you have heard me say this before, but I grew up in a family where my father operated food stores and food stores is what we did from 7 in the morning till 9, 10 o'clock at night, 6 days a week and then on Sundays until 10.

And as wonderful as my experiences were in the food store, today I don't like going to food stores. I just don't. And so I always say to my wife, I say, sweetheart, when you go to the food store, make a list and get everything you need.

Because I know when she doesn't make the list, I get to go, she gets to send me to the food store. And so I keep repeating that to her. And so one night I was out and she called me and she said to me, she wanted me to stop.

[36 : 28] I said, but Lexi, you just went to the food store. And I said, yeah, but I need you to stop and get this. And so I was listening to some sermons by C.J. Mahaney. And it was a marriage seminar I was listening to and I was listening to this one message.

And I'm driving to the food store complaining that Lexi can't make a list and get what she wants. from the food store. And so I have to go to the food store.

And C.J. Mahaney began to talk about how you spell love in marriage. And he said, the way you spell love in marriage is S-A-C-R-I-F-I-C-E.

It's sacrifice. And there I was complaining because I didn't want to sacrifice. I didn't want to do something that I did not want to do rather than doing something that would serve my wife and that would help her.

And it's so easy for us to just be absent-minded about the many ways we have these opportunities to serve our wives, to sacrifice for them, and we just protest against it.

[37 : 45] And maybe you're not as bad as I am in that way. But we spell love for our wives in the ways that we are willing to sacrifice for them.

And I think we all know that if we're not willing to do it in the small things, it's not that likely that we would be willing to do it in the big things.

And so that's what God says to husbands. he says sacrificially love your wife as your own body that you care for and protect.

Now the reality was then as it is now is that there are some Christian husbands who had unbelieving wives. And I can imagine that when a believing husband in that day or maybe even today would go to his wife and say, I will love you sacrificially and unconditionally.

And she tests him and says, you made it tell me that you will still love me sacrificially at your own expense no matter what, even if I don't submit to you, even if I don't respond to you in a favorable way.

[39 : 24] And as tempting as that question is, the correct answer to that question, whether in Paul's day or in our day, is yes. let me ask you, which of these job descriptions do you think is harder?

A wife submitting to her husband as the church submits to Christ, or a husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for the church.

If you've been halfway following this morning, friends, it's a no-brainer. God calls husbands to a far greater responsibility and duty in marriage than he does wives.

And it's not to say that it is easy to submit to husbands, but it is far more mind-boggling that God would call fallen men to love their wives at the standard of the love of Christ for his church.

Brothers and sisters, there is no greater expression of love than what Jesus Christ did on Calvary's cross. bar none.

[41 : 27] There's not one other expression in the universe that comes close to that, and yet that is what God calls husbands to. And the reality is that both husbands and wives need God's grace to carry that out.

we don't fulfill that because there's some good in us or we are just disciplined enough to do it. No, we need the grace of God, especially husbands, if we are going to, in any meaningful way, live a life that is dedicated to giving ourselves for the good of our wives in marriage.

And we need to understand this morning that this is not conditional. This is not you scratch my back, I scratch your back. This is not you scratch my back in submission, I will scratch your back in love.

No, these are mutually exclusive. They are easier to do when they are done together. But none of us is off the hook because the other one doesn't do what God calls them to do.

these are independent of each other. They are complementary, they work easier together, but we don't justify not doing one because of what the other person is doing.

[43 : 06] Now, having considered God's word to wives and to husbands, let's now consider God's word to both. In verse 31, Paul quotes Genesis 2.24, and it's a fitting conclusion to what he says to wives and husbands.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The union of the husband and wife is like the union of Christ in the church. And here it speaks about the husband's initiative to leave behind allegiances like father and mother, the highest expression of allegiance.

And giving that same allegiance to his wife and the union that the two of them are now making and becoming one flesh. And there's no doubt that in this one flesh reference, it has sexual intimacy in view, view, but it has so much more than sexual intimacy in view.

Paul tells us in verse 32 what it has in view. He refers to it as a profound mystery. Notice how he says that.

[44 : 35] This mystery is profound. It's a profound mystery. mystery in the Bible is not something that is unsolved or something that is spooky.

Mystery in the Bible is something that was formerly concealed, something that was formerly hidden by God in his own wisdom that he in time revealed to his apostles apostles in the new covenant.

Things that have formerly been hidden under the old covenant that God now reveals in the new covenant. And so Paul, in his apostolic authority, is saying to us that God's original intent in marriage was not about Adam and Eve.

He's saying to us, that is what you saw, that is what you see in the account. You saw Adam and Eve, you saw man and wife, you saw marriage being institutionalized.

But Paul says no. He says what God had in mind, what God was doing, was God was actually profoundly creating this picture of Christ and the church, this relationship between Christ and the church, this redemptive relationship between Christ and the church.

[46 : 03] God created this relationship that will tell this redemptive story. And all along, in the old covenant, this was being unfolded.

That's what the story of Hosea and Gomer is all about. And we just see it as a story of a man who really loved this unfaithful woman who kept on going away and being unfaithful.

know that was the unfolding of this profound mystery between Christ and the church. And notice that Gomer was not the one who was running after Hosea.

Hosea was the one who was running after Gomer and bringing her back because she was his wife. And this, this relationship, this story that is being told, it stops at the end of human history.

There is no marriage in heaven. There's no husband and wife in heaven. But in this time space world, the all wise, sovereign God chose the institution of marriage to put on display the relationship between Christ and the church.

[47 : 37] And so, brothers and sisters, this redemptive relationship between Christ and the church is what God had in mind when he created marriage.

And it is the ultimate purpose of marriage. marriage. It's about Christ and his church. It's not about a husband and his wife. And that's the amazing privilege that we have in marriage to portray this redemptive relationship between Christ and the church.

And this is not speaking about having a perfect marriage. Instead, it is speaking about having a marriage that is based on covenant and based on sacrifice and based on forgiveness and wanting to please God rather than to please ourselves.

It speaks about a wife who submits to a husband, who's laying aside her will, and a husband who is sacrificially loving his wife and laying aside his natural desire to be selfish and self-serving. Why? Because this is not about them. This is about Christ and the church. brothers and sisters, Christian marriage is based on the awareness that our marriage is more about Christ and his church than it is about me and my spouse.

[49 : 12] And so Paul's summary to both husbands and wives in verse 33 is he calls husbands to love their wives and he calls wives to respect their husbands.

And notice that Paul does something. He moves from the word submit to the word respect and it helps us to open a whole new vista about what that looks like in terms of what a wife is called to give to her husband.

And I just want to say this to us this morning. The most cancerous thing that we can do in our marriage is to do the contrary thing that we are called to do as a husband and as a wife.

It is cancerous when we do not love our wives in a self-sacrificing way. And it is cancerous when a wife does not respect her husband.

I am fully aware this morning that there is so much more that can be said about Christian marriage.

[50 : 42] And I am aware that this sermon has left a lot of questions unanswered. And in some areas intentionally so. But here is what I would say to every husband and wife under the sound of my voice.

Don't be concerned or the answers to the questions that you may have. Be more concerned to faithfully obey the things you do understand.

that. I can guarantee you that there's none of us this morning, and maybe I shouldn't say guarantee because I can't, but here's my own conviction.

My conviction is this, that we understand far more than we don't understand. And so brothers and sisters, especially husbands and wives, let us by the grace of God live out what we understand.

Let us by the grace of God embrace the conviction that marriage is not ultimately about me and my spouse. Marriage is ultimately about Christ and his church.

[52 : 02] And a sovereign God has caused whoever your husband is, whoever your wife is, to come together. And he and his own sovereignty has decided that you will be a franchise to put on display this relationship, this redemptive relationship between Christ and the church.

And may we do what we need to do to be able to do this, and that is to fix our eyes on Jesus. We need the grace of God. God, we need the strength of God, we need the perspective of God if we are able, if we are going to be able to do this.

We cannot do it on our own strength. We need to look to the Lord himself to give us the grace, to view our marriages in this way, and to humble ourselves and to say, God, this is about you and the church and not about me and my spouse.

Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we ask for your grace.

Would you help us, oh Lord, to embrace your word, embrace the understanding of what marriage is ultimately for and about, and Lord, would you help us to receive from you the grace that we need to humble ourselves as husbands and to love our wives self-sacrificially and to help our wives to humble themselves and to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ and to respect their husbands in a reverential way.

[54 : 33] Would you do your work, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. God