

The Perfect Couple

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Date: 24 August 2008

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[0 : 00] Verse 22, wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Verse 25, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

In one respect that's pretty clear, isn't it? But in this culture, at least the first, wives submit to your own husbands, makes as much sense to eat a crate of cat food for breakfast.

At least to women, they think, why on earth would I even acknowledge that? In this culture, wives submitting to their husbands is laughable, if not contemptible.

Fifteen years ago, when a passage like this was read, something like, wives submit to your husbands, there was an audible ssss in the congregation.

As I understood it, God's holy word was read about the most precious relationship you can conceivably have in this lifetime and there were Christians in the congregation that said, we don't like that.

[1 : 12] Now, how can Christians who are in a culture like Vancouver, if it's anything like Australia, how can we so quickly hiss at what is true?

I wonder if Vancouver is like Australia. Australia claims to be mature and smart, but now 50% of marriages just about end in divorce.

The statistics are very convincing. If you live together before you get married, you double the chance that you will be divorced. In Australia, police are called most commonly to homes for what? Domestic violence. That's the most common thing. There is fighting and hatred amongst couples. We live in countries where there may eventually be more children from divorced homes than from secure homes.

And unfortunately, in societies where there's a lot of divorce, the wounded, walking wounded, leave behind them a trail of pain and multiple dysfunctional relationships, which just keep getting worse.

[2 : 25] How can Christians who know how messed up the society we live in so easily dismiss God's word?

Oh, I don't agree with that. Well, the answer is, it's quite simple. You know the answer. We're sinful. We're ignorant and we're stupid.

I'm including myself in there. We're ignorant because the very first sin in the world, if you remember, was in the Garden of Eden when a wife ignored God's word and did not submit to her husband.

Also, at that same time, the husband did what husbands are notoriously doing even today. He did nothing, which is the frustration of every wife.

The two great sins, ignoring God's word, usurping the headship of a husband and the husband sits back and says, oh, okay, dear.

[3 : 34] What makes us think we actually know better than what God has already told us? Now, I want to challenge you on this. You are not smart if you think you know better than God's word.

We had a tragic example. Judy and I, just before we came to Australia, had a lovely couple, three beautiful children, lovely Christian couple. She teaches Sunday school. Come to us and say, we've just discovered our fourth child, which is half term, has an abnormality and the doctor's saying we should abort it.

You know, what should we do? We go, well, the last thing you do is you make a decision. Now, whatever you do, don't just rush ahead and do this. We need to pray. We need to think about this. But I'm pretty confident you do not just go and abort a child because it's not perfect.

The next day, they made the booking and the following day, they aborted the child. Now, their reason is what really disturbed me.

They said, we know we didn't do what God wanted for us, but we did what was best for our family. Since when is what God says not the best thing?

[4 : 53] Isn't that exactly what happens in this culture? People are choosing not to do what God says and we're seeing this domino effect of disastrous relationships.

my wife has a specialty which I'm proud of but I'm sad about too. She specialises in post-abortion counselling.

Now, you don't have to be a Christian to say this, but we know without a shred of doubt that that dear Christian couple without repentance and reconciliation will face a nightmare of pain, regret, guilt and shame for a lifetime because they actually thought they knew better than God and they were stupid, ignorant and sinful.

My challenge tonight is do not think you know better than the Lord. Please, do not be ashamed of the Lord for fear of what your culture thinks of you.

Now, as an Anglican minister, I occasionally get dressed up and look really quite nice in the robes and do weddings. I get my photos taken.

[6 : 12] People often say, lovely wedding, minister. And I've married and prepared 200 couples, perhaps. And I've also counselled scores of couples or individuals from broken marriages and I'm coming up to the beginning of my 28th year of marriage to my lovely Judy.

I love God. I love his word and I am convinced what God says is good. I don't care what the culture says.

I have seen the damage and I have seen the perplexed devastation of people of people who ignore God's word and think they know better.

Believe me, those who reject God's word for what they think is a better path are facing a dark and dangerous storm where all will eventually shipwreck their lives and relationships and more than likely if they ignore God's word shipwreck their faith.

death. So can I ask you to pray with me before we actually look at the text? Pray, God, help me see the truth, remove the clouds, soften my heart, give me the hunger and thirst for the truth.

[7 : 39] May I hear it. Help Richard teach it properly. So will you pray with me? Let's bow our heads. Father in heaven, Father, we live and breathe daily the air of a culture which is arrogant and blind to the things of God.

It laughs at your word and it laughs at those who believe it. This culture even attacks and condemns those of us who stand up for what you have said.

Father, we live in a culture that preaches unashamedly putting self-pleasure first, putting what we want and what we think is best first.

We live in a culture, Lord, that preaches that those who don't agree with them are judgmental and unloving and they do so to us in such an intolerant, judgmental and unloving way.

Lord, so loud has their preaching been that many churches in Vancouver now bow their knee to our culture because they're embarrassed or ashamed of your words.

[9 : 05] Oh, God, forgive them and change them, we pray. Lord, forgive each of us for we have at times been tempted to and even sinned in doing the very same thing.

Father, you invented marriage. Thank you. Your design is that marriage should be the most intimate and pleasurable, most important and fruitful of all possible relationships in our lives.

We praise you for the gift of marriage. Forgive us if by our words or actions we have cheapened it.

Father, forgive the hardness of our hearts for being so arrogant that we have at times believed you could actually be wrong and that somehow you're so feeble, you've let your Bible have words in it that you wish weren't there.

Forgive us for having such an arrogant attitude. We pray instead now by your Holy Spirit that you would grant light to remove the darkness that we may know, that you would give strength to uplift the weak and broken among us and that you might give us courage to embrace with new resolve your best for our best.

[10 : 39] Guide us now as we consider your word so that most holy place where we actually hear you speak might come.

Grant us now clear minds, open hearts and humble spirits for the glory of our Lord God and the strengthening of us, his church and bride.

Amen. Well, here we go. Now, to those who are new today or maybe need a little bit of help in remembering, our reading that we had was from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to quite a large first century church, a city church in Ephesus.

It will help tonight, I think, if you use the Bibles. Now, each of you should have a Bible like this in front of you and I think it'll be helpful to see what I'm going to show to you. So, if you turn to the back of the Bible to page 183, that's page 183.

We're looking at Ephesians 5 and it may be helpful to understand how this letter was written. It has six chapters. The first three basically talk about what God has done in Jesus.

[12:12] They're awesome. And then the second half, the last three, chapters four to six, then talk about, well, how we should respond. If that's what God's done in the first three chapters, then this is how we should live.

Now, if you look at chapter four, verse one, right down to chapter five, verse twenty, that's the first half of the second half where it basically is telling how we all should respond to this truth all in the same way.

So, there are things that we've been looking at over the last number of weeks. If this is true about Jesus, we all should live like this. We all should act that way. If that's true, let's change and live like that.

But now, at verse twenty-one, we move into how we should respond in specific relationships. These are things that are not necessarily true for everyone.

For example, not everyone's married. But what we have is we have different relationships. So, if you look in the last column on page 183, we see in verse twenty-two, he addresses wives.

[13:25] Then a little bit down to verse twenty-five, he addresses husbands. Then near the bottom of that page, chapter six, verse one, he addresses children.

Then over the page, if you have a look at verse four, it says fathers. Then in verse five, it says slaves.

And then down to verse nine, masters. So, basically, what Paul now is looking at is three very special but specific relationships.

The first, husbands and wives, marriage. The second, fathers and children, families and raising of children. And the third, slave and masters, which is pretty much like employee, employer, the work. Now, these are three of the most significant kinds of interactions people face. But tonight, we're specifically looking at the first of those specific relationships, marriage, husbands and wives.

[14:27] So, we're back on page 183. And I want to look at verse twenty-one because this is where, if you like, we go from the general, for everyone, to the specific.

Look with me at verse 21. He writes, Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This verse, which is a transition to the specifics, is very important because it introduces a word which is translated here, be subject, and in the other reading, which is the ESV, submit to one another.

It's the same idea, you submit, you're subject to someone. In a moment, we will read how wives are to be subject to their husbands in a specific kind of way.

But before that, we read here that we are all to submit to one another in a more general way.

[15:38] And the key to understanding what that means, before we look specifically, is the second part of verse 21. But let me read all of it and notice how verse 21 ends.

Be subject to one another, how or why, out of reverence for Christ. Christ. So, we're saying to you, God is saying, I want you to submit to other Christians, I want you to be subject to other Christians, and the reason I'm giving you is your reverence for Jesus Christ, your respect, your honour, your admiration of Jesus.

Why do we hold Jesus in reverence? Because of Jesus' submission. Because Jesus subjected himself.

His famous saying, I did not come to be served, said Jesus, I came to serve and give my life. I don't want you to bow down to me.

I've come to die for you. Jesus, the Lord of all, submitted himself to his disciples. He loved them. He always looked out for them.

[16:50] He put them first. And the night before he died, what did he do? He washed their feet. He said, guys, if I'm submitting myself and washing your feet and loving you, do the same. He submitted to his father's will, did he not?

He had a choice at the Garden of Gethsemane, what I want or what you want, Father. And he prays, not my will. Your will be done.

I will do what you say and I will die. And he submitted. He subjected himself to the authorities who decided to judge, condemn and crucify him. But we see the tragedy of his death as good.

Through Jesus submitting and subjecting himself, he died for our sins. So out of reverence for his incredible love, humbling, he says, do the same.

Be subject to each other. Now, we do not claim to be so smart that we say, yeah, I understand all that.

[17 : 58] In fact, I wonder if any of you have had a brain freeze. If you're young, you probably know what a brain freeze is. Maybe you don't. Maybe it only happens in Australia. A lot of strange things happen in the southern hemisphere.

Our toilet water goes a different way, for one. But have you had a brain freeze? A brain freeze is when you go to the 7-Eleven and get one of those big things of slushies, I think they're called, and they're very cold and you drink them really fast.

But if you drink them very fast, you know what happens? You get this headache. Oh, man. You know, if you see kids walking out of the 7-Eleven and going, oh, man, they're having a brain freeze. That's a handy thing to know if you're an old person.

You walk up and say, having a brain freeze. They go, wow, he's so cool. Oh, I wish. Anyhow, what you're about to have now is a brain freeze.

That is, if this is the truth about God and my brain is only so small, sometimes when I try to understand God, it hurts. A mystery is something I know is true but I just find it hard to understand and the more I think about it, it hurts.

[19 : 03] I know the universe goes forever and ever and ever and never stops. You try thinking about that for a while, you start getting a brain freeze. I know God is the creator of all things and sustains everything. As I think about it, I start trying to understand, I get a brain freeze.

It hurts. Well, even understanding God submitting himself and subjecting himself to us, his bride, is a mystery.

Have a look at verse 32. In the midst of describing how a husband is to love his wife, he goes on to say in verse 32, this mystery is a profound one and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. This subject of marriage is vast. We cheapen it. The subject of marriage is vast because in this passage alone it actually says, did you know that God designed marriage on Jesus marrying you, the church?

We are called his bride and he is our groom. It is vast as we consider what marriage is because God himself is what we are modelled on.

[20 : 25] Even though this is a vast subject, I want to say two things quickly. The first is marriage is based on Jesus and the church. But in a way to understand that, even more amazing mystery, so a bigger brain freeze is this.

Did you know that our marriage, what God designed, is based on the Trinity? On the Trinity.

God is Trinity. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons but one God. Each God but not three gods but one.

God himself, Father, Son and Spirit, in the Godhead there is submission. In the Godhead the Holy Spirit subjects himself to the will of the Father and the Son.

In the Godhead, who's in charge? The Father. Jesus always submits to his Father. He obeys his Father.

[21 : 29] He says what his Father has told him to say. Jesus sees the Father in the Trinity as the head and he obeys him. It's never the other way around.

Isn't it interesting? But in no way can we say that Jesus, being subject to his Father, is demeaning, somehow implies that he's inferior or weak.

No way can we say if Jesus submits to his Father that he's taking the second option, that he's not reaching his full potential, that the Father is somehow being a bit of a bully and putting him in a lower place.

Far from it. In fact, it's the exact opposite. For we see the Father who Jesus submits to elevate him to Lord of Lord, judge of the living and the dead, the one whom we will stand before and give praise and honour on the last day.

In the Godhead himself there is submission and it's good. In fact, submission, to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, to submit to any authority you are being, God-like.

[22 : 51] And so to submit to a husband is to be God-like. It's a mystery, yes, but it's a good truth. One other extra brain freeze, seeing you're going so well and no one's collapsed yet.

You do realise in chapter one of Genesis, the very beginning, God said let us make man in our image. Let's make mankind exactly like us, in our likeness.

And the one true God made how many? Two. To be made in the likeness of God is to be made in relationship, where just as the Son submits to the Father, we have a couple, the Head and the Helper.

Well, if marriage is based on the Trinity, which is the first thing I wanted to say, marriage is also based on Jesus and the Church.

As that passage was read to us, we are told, in verse 25, that we are to love our wives if we are husbands, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, presenting her as a bride.

[24 : 05] Let me read the whole passage to you from verse, actually, before I do that, I want to talk about the wives. God is marrying us as if we are his bride.

Wives, with that in mind, let's see what God says to you. Verse 22. Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

Now, it's pretty clear, and this is written in a number of places by a number of apostles, that wives are to be subject to their husbands. In the same way the Church submits to our Lord Jesus and honours him, wives apparently are to submit to their husbands as the head of their relationship. He's in charge. God solved the argument before it started. He said, I have to choose someone, okay? Husbands, you're in charge. I hold you responsible.

[25 : 22] So husbands should shake with that responsibility. Now, what does it look like? Well, Judy will tell you in our marriage it's just phenomenal. But there's not only good husbands, there's bad husbands.

Let me say, if you are married to a good husband, as a rule, if you're a Christian wife married to a godly Christian husband who is trying his hardest to be like Jesus, who treats his wife with love, respect, who is willing to do anything for her, you will find a very happy wife who gladly follows his lead and loves him in return.

If, however, you're a wife who's married to a lousy husband, just line up over here and we can discuss that in a therapy group afterwards. It's not easy.

But I want to point out something that's very important. In our culture we decide if something doesn't work you change it. What is very important in the scriptures is we are told that God designed humanity, God designed the world and gave it order.

We're commanded, for example, to submit to every authority because God has put them there. We submit to police, we submit to parliamentarians, we submit to all sorts of authorities, God has put them there.

[26 : 52] Never in the Bible do you see God say, plan B is if it's not working, swap. You never hear wives command your husbands and husbands submit.

You never hear of children being told, tell your parents what they should be doing. Slaves, from now on, you're in charge and your masters must follow your lead. Imagine if citizens could arrest a policeman they don't like.

If students could actually tell their teachers where to go. If a patient could say, I want this operation now. If soldiers told a general where they'd like to fight.

It would be chaos. Interestingly, I think we do live in a culture where wives do command husbands. Children certainly have more rights than their parents.

Employees often have more power than their employers. Students in school have their teachers quaking with fear. And even patients today seem to be told to challenge everything a doctor says to them.

[27 : 58] It's partly being postmodern, if you want to know, where we reject all authority structures and think we know better. The point I want to make is this. If God says this is the way it should be, don't change it to fix it.

We'll look more about wives submitting near the end. But you'll notice, if you're observant, wives only get a few lines. Men. Ha! They need, well I reckon, Paul said, look, I probably need to write a

whole book on what husbands should do.

But there's a lot more there, isn't there? I think husbands are slower. I am one. Am I right in saying that, dear? What does God say to husbands?

Let's read from verse 25. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

I want you to notice God does not say to husbands, listen husbands, I put you in charge, now rule. He doesn't say that to masters. He doesn't say that to parents.

[29 : 11] He doesn't say that to any authority. Any authority that has God-given authority, God never tells them to rule. He always says, be kind, be gentle, be loving, be patient.

I put you in charge, don't let it go to your head. Be gentle, serving, caring. That's what he's saying to the husbands. Husbands, you're in charge, but what I want you to do is love.

Love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. He says, you are in charge, husbands, I've decided this, no arguments.

Too bad if you don't want to be in charge. You are in charge, says God, like I am in charge of you. So I want you to love your wife in the same way I love the church, so far that you are willing to die for her.

The wife's not asked for that. Jesus is saying to husbands, use my love for you as the minimum requirement for how you love your wife.

[30 : 26] There's two parts. The first part is love your wife the way Jesus loved the church. Let me read it to you again because how did Jesus love the church?

Verse 25. Look with it. It's there, husbands. And have a look, wives or wives to be, husbands to be. It's pretty handy to have a bit of a job description. This is what husbands should do.

Verse 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, 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.

Now he is talking there how God has loved us. And he is saying, husbands, love your wives that way.

What does Jesus do in verse 26? That he might make us holy. That's what it means to be sanctified. Cleansed by the washing of the word, knowing forgiveness and assurance by the truth.

[31 : 41] Jesus has worked so hard that he might present us to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that we might be holy and without blemish.

Our Lord has never finished with us. He loves us. He forgives us. He is extraordinarily patient with us.

And the Lord is saying, husbands, love your wives like that. Now if there is a single husband here that raises his voice, that gets angry, that's impatient, that raises his hand or strikes his wife, that says anything that is demeaning, that in any way does not honour her and respect her.

Beware, husband. The smell of hell is close to your marriage. How dare you take the Lord's most precious bride and treat her with anything less than the most profound love.

When I preach at marriages, I say, the only command husbands and wives need to remember is to love each other. But for husbands, I say, let me qualify that.

[32 : 52] I love pizza. I love chocolate. I love my dog. By the way, this is not necessarily in order because my wife's there and the kids come. When the Lord says, love your wife as Christ loved the church, how can I qualify that husbands or husbands to be?

It's this. Love your wives sacrificially. Sacrificially. You are willing to pay any price to present your bride, your wife, enriched, encouraged, pure, blameless, joyful, at peace, loved.

And so your agenda is not what's in it for me. Your agenda is, how can I raise up my bride that she might grow in her love for the Lord, that she might delight in my love for her, that our children will see clearly they love each other.

That should be a husband's agenda. It is so shameful. When you go to other cultures where the gospel has not reached and women are sold, they're treated like objects, they're not allowed to be educated, the list goes on.

But the irony is in a culture where Jesus has been proclaimed and women have been raised to equality and have been treated in every way equal but different to men.

[34 : 28] That same culture jettisons God and the women say we also want to jettison the men. We want to be in charge. It's crazy.

Husbands, your job is not finished. And it is a helpful thing occasionally to ask your wife, darling, how could I be a better husband?

Oh, and by the way, darling, I'm going to listen. I'll take notes and I'll actually try and do it. Can I encourage all husbands to do that?

The second part, verses 28 and following, I won't read, but it basically says husbands will love their wives as their own body. I want to conclude.

Let me say a word to singles. When I was here, there were times the whole church was full and there was chairs down the aisles.

[35 : 38] I don't know where those people are now. I pray they're growing in their faith. But the most common thing that came to me in a pastoral crisis were usually women, but occasionally men, that had crossed the line because they're impatient or they didn't think what God said mattered that much and they had ruined a relationship and they were broken and shattered.

If you are a husband, seek a wife that loves the Lord Jesus, that longs to see him honoured and when she's with you, she's encouraging you to be like Jesus too.

As a rule, I'm a fan of women because I don't know women that well. I'm a man, so I know what men are like.

So, men, be, if you are single, a husband or divorced, especially if you are single at this point, be the man that you want your daughter to marry.

Be a man of integrity, honesty, care. Be actually caring towards that woman as if she were your sister and you would find anyone to protect her.

[36 : 58] Never look at any woman in such a way that if they saw you, you'd be ashamed. Treat them as Jesus treated women, where they actually found that they were treated as equals and loved and respected.

Men, the biggest mistake that Adam made and men make is we are not willing to lead. We're cowards.

As a rule, most of the women that came to me would say, when is he going to ask me? Or something along those lines. I want to encourage men to be decisive and godly, but for both sets of singles, forget about finding the perfect partner.

For goodness sake, start being the perfect partner. Love the Lord Jesus and the ones that will be properly attracted to you are the kind of partner you want. Can I say to wives, it is difficult in any culture if you have a lousy husband.

This particular culture has made it easy, you just divorce him. That is not necessarily the solution. Whether you're married to a godly husband or not, as I understand it, the scriptures say the best thing you can do is love them as if they were the Lord.

[38 : 18] So that's what I encourage you to do. And for husbands, well I think I've told you enough, for goodness sake, be beyond reproach, loving.

And divorcees, I, good divorce. Have you ever heard that? We had a good divorce. I go, oh yeah, good divorce.

That's sort of like, you know, a pleasant murder. There's no such thing. But, divorce is not the unforgivable sin.

Divorce is a natural consequence of living in a culture that denies the living God. Our Lord Jesus offers wonderful forgiveness, restoration and even renewal.

But you don't quickly return until you have dealt with what you need to. So I encourage divorcees to be slow and prayerful.

[39 : 20] Work hard at returning to where they wish they had been. And then wait patiently. Let me pray. Sorry, it was a bit longer than it should have been. Thank you. This is clearly a bigger subject than I think we can comprehend.

But one thing is clear. Father, you loved us so much. You sent your son to be our groom.

And we, though we are broken and weak, were offered his hand in marriage.

And Jesus himself died that we might become your bride. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have not finished.

It is your purpose to present each one of us perfect and pure, spotless and blameless on that last day. May we, in our earthly relationships as husbands and wives, or those that are praying to

become that, or those recovering from a broken relationship, may we seek what you have called us to and by your Holy Spirit embrace it patiently and joyfully.
[40 : 51] In Jesus' name. Amen.