

We are Family

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[0 : 00] So I'm often told when I'm in a conversation with someone, we're chatting, chatting, chatting, and they go, sorry, I've lost you.! And maybe you've felt that as well.

Maybe for you, you've ever been confused in a conversation or you're the one who someone goes, sorry, I've lost you. And perhaps you are here reading this passage in Ephesians and you've been coming each week.

You've been hearing what Paul has been saying about the church and about Jesus. And you've just thought he's shifted from this topic to this topic.

And you might have just gone, Paul, I've lost you. And you're talking about marriage. You're talking all of that after talking about the church.

And what I'm aware of is that this topic, marriage and relationships, can be quite a personal topic. It can be quite a personal topic for many reasons, whether it's past or present or current situations of marriage experienced or even observed.

[1 : 08] And so the question we might have is, why does Paul jump in and begin talking about marriage and our relationships? God can care all about the spiritual. He can care about eternity.

But why does he need to jump into my everyday? Well, there's two things we need to understand here. Number one, Ephesians follows a logic that Paul often begins with in a lot of his letters.

It begins with who God is and what he's done before showing how that changes how we live. And that's exactly what's happening here. Because the gospel isn't just about Sunday in heaven.

It should reshape your entire everyday life, your home, your relationships, even your work. And if Jesus is your savior, he is also your king in everything.

Jesse, that's what you're stepping into today as you get baptized. But there's another reason that marriage, children, the household, workplace comes into this passage that's talking heavily about the church.

[2 : 21] It's because the church is a family. We are family. Yes, you've got that theme song in your head right now. That's why Paul talks about households.

Because the church itself is a household. Because I said it two weeks ago. When you trust in Jesus, your family expands. You gain brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so what happens in your home matters also for the life of the church. And so, Jesse, you're not just being baptized into Christ. You are welcomed into his family.

And we pray and hope that you feel that deep richness of being family. And here, Paul speaks about two areas that should be shaped and transformed by the gospel.

Number one is homes. And for us today, workplaces. You see, it's the commonplace for everyone. It's where the rubber hits the road. It's where we interact with household members, with our colleagues.

[3 : 26] And this passage begins with this kind of hinge verse that concludes last week's passage that Steve preached on and precedes what has been read out for us today.

Verse 21, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And what Paul starts with the call for us to follow God's example in our character, all the stuff that he spoke about last week, extends in this verse to how we relate to one another.

That submission here is to be ready to renounce your own will for the sake of others. And Christ does that himself.

It says in verse 2 of the same chapter, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

It's in fact what you see in Philippians 2 verse 6, a very common creed that we say. Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own

advantage.

[4 : 34] Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Jesus is God.

He is God. Yet, he, despite his nature, makes the choice to submit. And this forms the basis of us, how we ought to think about our relationships as others-centered.

And this means that if you are single, if you're not married, maybe you're not planning on getting married, this passage still matters to you.

And so the question we all need to answer is, how should our relationships look like in light of the cross?

How should our relationships look like in light of the cross? And there are two analogies that I think that are helpful to understand each sphere of our life.

[5 : 33] Number one, homes are mirrors. Number two, workplaces are altars. Homes and mirrors, workplaces are altars.

So now today, in regard to marriage, I will recognize that I will not give you a full dissection on this. But that's because we've actually got a whole term series worth discussing marriage in term two. So I will try to keep it brief. It's something to look forward to. You might feel like you've had enough about marriage from me after this service. But you get a really exciting term of it. I'm really keen personally.

But the first thing I want to mention about this section is that what is so clear about love and marriage is that it is shaped by God.

Who God is shapes what marriage is. Because love, marriage, is not a human invention. It's not.

[6 : 31] You might feel it. You might experience it deeply. But it is, in fact, a reflection of God. And even more so in this passage about marriage, a reflection of Christ and his church.

Have a look at verse 23. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. His body of which he is the saviour.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. You see, marriage is a reflection of the very nature of Christ and his church.

And here we need to be very careful that we don't put our cultural lens and gavel on this passage and discount parts of Scripture here that we might think can be too archaic.

Or even import our own personal, selfish, harsh view that Paul does not have. Paul is not communicating that husbands and wives and therefore men and women are not equal.

[7 : 34] Nor that women are subjugated under men to willless obedience. Not even that the particular household role that the husband must do or the wife must do.

Yet we also have to recognize the fallenness of the world that we live in. That this passage and many others have been used as coercion and selfish and immoral gain by many people, particularly men, to justify domestic abuse.

And that is spiritual abuse. That is sin. And the Bible is by no means condoning it. It is, in fact, condemning it. Because this is not Paul's view on submission.

So what exactly is this submission in regard to? Firstly, it is a submission first and foremost to Christ, which we saw in verse 21.

But secondly, we need to understand Paul's instruction to the husband in this passage. You see, wives get this one verse where the men get all of these verses.

[8 : 40] Verse 25 to 31. Read along with me. Husbands, love your wives. Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

And to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. But holy and blameless. Notice the word that I emphasized.

Love. And in the original language, there are different kinds of love. And the love that Paul chooses here is the agape love. Let's say that together.

Agape or agape. This agape love is the same one that Christ Jesus has for the church. The same one that we saw earlier in verse 2.

It's a special kind of love. And what does this agape love look like? It's number one. It's self-emptying. Have a look at verse 25. Look at how Christ gives himself, sacrifices himself.

[9 : 52] So too does the husband give himself up, pouring out of himself. There is at great cost Jesus' life. It's self-emptying.

But it is self-sacrificing. Jesus makes us clean through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection.

And so, husbands ought to do the same. Have the same self-emptying, self-sacrificing love.

Renounce not just his will, but his life for the sake of the church.

That's the kind of love here. The love that runs into a burning building to save a child. This is the love that Jesus has for the church.

And it's not some overly romanticized, overly emotional sense of love. It is this self-denying love.

And a love that has an effectual commitment.

[10 : 57] Which is the centerpiece of the marriage that we see here. Which defied Roman culture. Where marriage functioned more transactionally. And was for economic gain.

So, friends, if you are a husband, you are to lead like Jesus Christ. You serve your family not for selfish gain or to be manipulative or abusive.

This passage should not give any space for a man to think that he can control or demand submission from his partner. To rule and demand is not the picture that the Lord has.

Even beyond the scriptures that we have just read. This is not the picture. Why? Because your life ought to be a mirror. At the very core of who you were made to be.

Man and woman. You were made to be a mirror. Because God made you in the image of himself. In Genesis 1.29. Which is to say that God has made you to be his representative on this earth.

[12 : 00] With dignity, likeness and agency. And therefore, he establishes the marriage, the home, to be a mirror too. Like, that's a beautiful image, isn't it?

Like, just imagine if a light were to shine onto a mirror, it gets reflected everywhere. We'll see that on the screen here. And the same goes with the reflection of Christ's love.

It ought to permeate everywhere in your life. You just bounce God's love out. Have a look at verse 28. Friends, when a believer's life is so transformed by Jesus, it's no longer about the self and the self and the self.

It's so much about the other. And so, too, in marriage, it is so much about your spouse. Yet, ironically, did you see?

Verse 28. By doing so, by loving the other so much, you actually love yourself. Why? We saw it in 31.

[13 : 24] Because God's purposes for marriage was for it to be a united companionship. Not two separate people with two separate agendas. One flesh. And so, submission is not something the husband calls the wife to.

But the wife willingly does to support the husband in his pursuit to submit to Christ and to pour out of himself so that the wife might do the same.

Husbands, your obligation in marriage is to her. If you are one who subscribes to biblical headship, as John Calvin says, it is not kingship.

That's reserved to and for Jesus. But of companionship. Your purpose is to love and serve her selflessly at great personal cost.

It's so that the bride might thrive. It's to support her in being the woman God has called her to be.

It's to respect her. To see her succeed in Christ, in her communities, in her workplaces, as a mother, as a daughter.

[14 : 39] That's your submission to Christ. And yet, this passage is not prescriptive in how this necessarily gets worked out in marriage. And I'm not here to say that the woman or man ought to do particular tasks in the home.

But I do think the passage does tell us about our posture. It tells us the posture of submission, yet also the posture of headship. And Jesus has both postures, doesn't he?

If you know this story, the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26, he says, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Jesus submits to the will of the Father, yet he willingly leads his bride to life by giving his life on the cross.

So friends, if you want to see the beauty of the gospel and how it ought to shape your life, take a leaf out of Jesus' book. And when you think of it practically, the relationship is very much one that is equally very other person-centered.

[15 : 46] I remember talking to some newlyweds, and in fact, it's actually a common thing when I ask them, after honeymoon or maybe after two months, I ask how they're going. And they're loving

it.

They're loving that they can be together. But marriage is hard. And the thing often that they say is they didn't expect how tough it was. They didn't expect how tough it was to love the other person at great cost of their energy, their mind, and their willpower.

They were ready to sleep, but something else had to happen. And the picture that we ought to see is that both spouses equally are so much for the other, that both benefit.

You know, I know one of my friends is really intentional about making sure that his wife is not just well-rested, having time for herself, but he will intentionally carry extra load so that his wife can have time in the Word.

Maybe she'll go to the park. Maybe she'll journal about God's goodness to her. And I think that's a wonderful practice. And my favourite weddings to go to aren't just the ones where there's a good cake.

[16:59] It's great. But even a lovey-dovey couple. But I get stunned when I hear in the wedding speech that the thing that they are most excited about being together, living together, is to do hospitality.

That they can have friends, family, and church over because they are all invited into God's family. And I just go, wow. Isn't God so great and gracious and glorious that he made this couple who wish to use their marriage and their home to give their life to Christ?

You see, Paul's heart for marriage is that the couple submits to Jesus Christ as their Lord, which is why the heartbeat in verse 32 says, this is a profound mystery.

But I'm talking about Christ and the church. You see, the thrust of what matters to Paul ultimately is that whether single or married, that God's son, Jesus Christ, is the saviour of the world, who's the bride, is the church.

And Paul is calling you to be a part of his bride. Because it's possible to have an all-loving marriage, mutual caring relationship, yet still not have Jesus at the centre of the marriage.

[18:17] And the goal that Paul says is emulation. The goal is that this relationship, this one flesh, itself submits to Jesus Christ, much as everything else is to as well.

And how beautiful would that be, the picture, if the church did that too? Imagine, as in verse 21, we all serve each other at great cost, so each of us might lift Christ high.

I mean, that's the picture that the Lord wants to see in the home and also for children. Have a look at 6 verse 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

You see, the hope and prayer for the child is to obey the parents. Sorry, kids, it's a reality. It's that the parents' marriage emulate Christ and lead the child up to know Christ.

That's the goal. That's the hope. That's the prayer. And in verse 3, when you obey, when you submit to God and his law, it is supposed to be for our benefit, whether we see that or not.

[19:38] That's why it says, so that it may go well. It's not to praise an egotistical God who demands with no rhyme and reason, but submission to God is actually for our benefit.

And so it continues in verse 4. Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And friends, in our personal desires to get our children to act, behave in a way that you desire, it should never be harsh, should never be unreasonable, because the term here, exasperate, is to cause excessive anger and frustration.

And where they perhaps feel so suffocated by rules and regulations, that may seem so unrealistic and unreasonable and legalistic. And notice that exasperation and training our kids to know Jesus are in contrast in this verse as well.

Training and instruction of the Lord is not, well, I'm going to use God's word for my purposes. Hey, it says honour your mother and father, so you better honour me. It's not that. It's not saying, hey, well, God's law says this, you should do this.

It's actually to help our kids see Jesus as Lord and why he is ultimate, why he's beautiful. Train your children in godly wisdom.

[21:02] Help them see God's wisdom in living in the world that he created. And so, parents, I want to say this. There are so many things in this world, so many things that are attractive, that steal our joy and our calendars.

Sometimes these are things that you desire and dream for your children, but even God does not have for your dream and for their dream. He has a better plan, as we see in Romans 8.

There may be external pressures or expectations that you feel that you must meet, but don't choke your child with all these pressures. Keep the main thing, the main thing.

Dads and mums, don't disengage in raising your kids to know Jesus. Don't leave that responsibility to the youth leaders or the scripture teachers. If you need tools, come ask me. I would love to help you. I would love to increase your toolkit.

But model and teach and encourage your kids to love the Lord. Why don't you find one of the young adults who were raised by Christian parents and ask them, how were they disciplined by their parents?

[22 : 01] How did they fail? How could they have done better? But how amazing it is that we have walking witnesses around of God's grace through family and church discipleship walking around us.

And as someone who's been a children's minister and a single person over many years, I've had the privilege of sitting in many, many homes and families for meals, and there have been so many moments that I've just gleaned from them.

It's just been a joy. And I get to see a glimmer of what Christ has purposed the home to be. And so if our homes are meant to be mirrors that reflect Jesus, I just have a few questions, if you don't mind.

They're going to be on the screen. I just want you to either write them down, take a photo of them, and just reflect about these questions at home. The questions are, does the interests of Christ reflect in how and who you choose to date?

Question number two, in much the same way as Christ, where do you need to self-empty out of submission for another, whether that be in marriage or also another relationship?

[23 : 10] If your child were to answer this question, what do you think they would say? What is your parents' dream for you?

Just think about those questions, take a photo of them. But I am aware, keep it on this slide for now, James, I am aware that for some, we might have the question, what do I do in a household that doesn't worship Jesus?

Maybe you've been brought from death to light, and you see that Jesus is ultimate, and the posture of your heart is not just submitting to Jesus, but everyone in your life does submit to Jesus. And that's a real painful and heartbreaking reality.

And I just want to say, I hear your pain. It's awful and hard. And I remember hearing an encouragement from someone, and they said, keep asking the Lord to use your actions, your posture, your love, and your language to be so transformed by the gospel that what your family sees is someone who is actually a better husband and a better wife, a better mom, a better dad because of Jesus and not for it.

That you're a better husband, better son, not because of self-help, but because of Jesus Christ. That's how they see the goodness of the gospel here. They experience the benefits of the gospels at this point.

[24 : 28] And this isn't a promise that the Lord will then reward you with them trusting in Jesus, but we do these things ultimately in loving obedience to our king.

And so remember, friends, you have been called to be conformed into the image of Christ. And so my prayer alongside you is that this mirror shines through to your family.

But the last fear that Paul talks about is slaves and masters. And it's really important to note that the concept of slaves here is very distinctive to our understanding of slavery today, whether that be modern slavery around the world or even years ago, the Southern African American slavery.

You see, in Roman cities, two-thirds of the population were either slaves or had been slaves. Many slaves were working in high official roles alongside non-slaves.

And this isn't identical to modern slavery. But perhaps the principles we see in this passage actually apply to work relationships today. So employees, colleagues, work teams, bosses, all of that.

[25 : 35] So in verse 5, it says, slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

You see, for the slave, Paul encourages them to look to Christ. Look beyond your earthly master as your motivation and encouragement to respect and fear your boss.

And the posture isn't grumbling, but with an attitude, an attitude of love, self-sacrificing, self-giving. Speak with gentleness. Be quick to listen, to feedback.

Because your performance here is ultimately not for the appeasement of your earthly master, but because of Christ. Have a look, verse 6. Obey them, not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

And then further in verse 7, you serve as if you were serving the Lord, not people. And I think this is a helpful image when you work that you think of your place of work as an altar.

[26 : 47] It's an altar for the Lord. That your work that you do is a sacrifice that is pleasing to them. Whether it's stacking up shelves, whether it's putting data into a spreadsheet, it is sacrifice.

The attitude, the content, the result is for him and by him. And I remember when one of our wardens, I'm sorry I didn't mention this to you, Soren, said in an interview a while back that living for Jesus as a lawyer meant bringing restoration for those who were hurting and bringing justice and order in regard to Christ.

And so workplaces are altars in that what you do is a sacrifice you offer to God. And maybe it even might look so beautiful and costly that your colleagues and bosses begin to see that there's something different about you.

That perhaps by seeking to emulate Christ in your character, you might have the opportunity to be a messenger of the gospel. It says in 2 Corinthians 2.15, For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

And isn't that the goal for Christians as mirrors, as those made in God's image, to see others grasp hold of that light? Or this image, this aroma, this smell.

[28 : 06] That as we give our efforts, our time and our energy at work, that Jesus might be that real aroma that our friends see. And as you live for Jesus, you carry, it's an ugly image, but the death of Christ in your life.

The death of Christ that brings forgiveness of sin, confidence in God's grace. It's life-changing stuff that I want my colleagues to know. Because Paul reminds us that whether you or your colleague recognises this reality, there is a true king.

There is a true master. And there is really only one master. Verse 9, Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him.

You see, the gospel is this levelling playing field. And so our posture at work, as managers, bosses, workers, is to remember there is one master above it all.

That's the centre. My life is not my own. And it's for him because my workplace is an altar. That I am to be a pleasing sacrifice for him and to be attractive, not aesthetically, for those around me.

[29 : 18] And it might lead to a question, for example, what do I do in a corporate workspace that doesn't allow for topics in the gospel? Firstly, any form of headship or any leader, law or authority that pushes you to sin or bounds you further away from Christ is not one you are to submit to.

And I want to give you a little encouragement. Just because your boss pressures you to work doesn't mean you have to, particularly when it's outside your contract. I know that slavery, we feel enslaved to pressures, but you don't have to take that work shift on a Sunday if you're a casual. If your conscience is seared, if you are aware that your work is negatively affecting your relationship with Christ and his church, then what will you do about it? I'm not encouraging you to go to your workplaces and break protocol and start telling your friends about Jesus, but perhaps you need to get creative and invest time with your colleagues inside so you can speak with them outside and ask the Lord to reveal an opportunity and a door that will enable you perhaps to read the Bible with your colleague.

But friends, as I close, I just want to ask, if I were to ask your colleagues, your neighbours, your kids, your friends, if they could see Jesus in how you live, what do you think they would say?

Right now, if I ask them, what do you think they would say? And if you have any doubt or worry and you wish that your life was consumed with Jesus' love, your first step is this.

[31 : 01] Find your rest and your confidence in a marriage that is set in stone. A love that was first formed because Christ initiated love with you on the cross.

1 John 4, 19, we love because he first loved us. Obsess over his love for you. Think about it so much and perhaps what you actually need is that to be an everyday thing and not just a Sunday thing.

Maybe the reason that you are not reflecting Christ is because your home and your workplaces and your mind and your calendar is filled with so much stuff. Not bad stuff, just neutral. And so I just want to give you one little tip to speckle your home, your workplace with reminders.

One thing I've started to do is to prayerfully and financially support a friend in ministry. And what I've done is placed it in a book I always read. And I've been reminded when I look at that to pray for her. And maybe you need to stick a picture of a photo of your boss or your workplace, your wife, your husband, your child in that book. But maybe before you open Netflix and pray.

[32 : 14] Pray, pray, pray. Contend for the heart for the person that they might be so in awe and captivated by the Lord Jesus. Ask the Lord's help to be a self-emptying person like Christ and pray that God will enable you to live out the gospel in front of them so that they might see Christ greater and greater.