

Ephesians 5:21-33

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[0:00] just to see what it says, and to explain it, and to apply it, and to think about what it means in our lives, which is really what we do Sunday after Sunday. We want to look at God's Word and see what He's saying to us.

Ephesians 5, 22-33, page 978 in the Pew Bible. Now, in this section of Ephesians, we've been really asking this question.

What difference does Christ make in our everyday lives? What difference does Christ make in our everyday lives? In chapters 1-3 of this book of Ephesians, we thought all about what God has done for us in Christ.

And now, in the second half of the book, we've been thinking, what difference does that make? Ephesians is a very beautiful book. It's very simply constructed, but it's very profound. And tonight, as Pastor Greg mentioned, we are looking at the topic of marriage.

What difference does Christ make when it comes to marriage, to the relationship between husbands and wives? Now, I know that not all of us here tonight are married.

[1:07] So you're already thinking, oh my goodness, this whole sermon is going to have nothing to do with me. Turning off. But actually, I think that this passage is going to be helpful for all of us.

It's not just for married people. In fact, if you are married, I think it'll be helpful. But if you're not married, I hope it's helpful to you on several levels.

First, if you think you might want to be married someday, or be remarried someday, this will be a helpful text for you. To think about what kind of expectations, or what kind of goals, or priorities you should have as you seek a future spouse.

Second, I think this text can help us too. Because remember what Paul's been saying in this section. What he's been saying, and what he's been showing us, is that because of what Christ has done for us, we're a family in Christ.

We're one body. And what it means to be one body is to encourage one another. To speak the truth and love to one another. So, here is a text that helps all of us know how to encourage and speak the truth and love to one another, to those people in our midst who are married.

[2:18] Maybe you're single, you don't have any first-hand experience, but you know what? You've got something better than first-hand experience to help your married friends. You've got the very word of God to help them out. So, we're going to look at this passage together.

We're going to see what it teaches us. And we're all going to be equipped to pray for one another, encourage one another, and to live this stuff out together. Okay, so what difference does Christ make in marriage? We're going to read through Ephesians 5, 22 through 33, and we're going to see three things.

That knowing Christ, that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes the point of marriage, it changes the pattern of marriage, and it changes the power for marriage. Here we go.

Starting in verse 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands as 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.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

[3:23] 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 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. This mystery is profound. And I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Okay, let's pray. Lord Jesus, we need your help. We need your help to live out the great grace that you've given us, and we need your help to understand your word by your Holy Spirit. So help us tonight as we come to this passage about marriage. Lord, help us to see and help us to understand what you are teaching us in this passage. Lord, guide my words, guide all of our hearts to hear what your Spirit is saying to us in this text, so that we might be built up, so that your church might live into what you call us to live into, so that we might display your goodness and your glory to the world around us.

Father, we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, let's dive right in. Now, I'm going to give you guys a warning. If you're new here tonight, this sermon is going to be a little longer than our sermons normally are, because this is a big passage.

[4 : 40] But we're going to move quick. So that means you've got to keep your listening cap on, because we're going to fly. Okay, sound good? All right. So point number one, what's the point of marriage? What is the point of marriage? I think if you ask most people throughout history, you'd get one of two answers.

What's the point of marriage? I think most people would say that the point of marriage is either social stability or its personal fulfillment. Here's what I mean. What is marriage for? Most traditional or conservative cultures would speak a lot about social stability when it comes to marriage. Marriage is the building block of a healthy society. If marriage goes, the culture goes to pot. Marriage is the context for raising the next generation of healthy children. That's good for society. Marriage is something that provides resilience for people, so they work hard and be productive. And make a stable society. That's one answer. What's marriage for? It's making a stable society. The other answer that people often give, and this one's a little more popular today, is that marriage is all about personal fulfillment.

Marriage is the thing where you find someone who brings out your best. Marriage is the thing where you find someone, as Jerry Maguire said, who completes you. You find your soulmate.

[5 : 42] You find the person who just makes you sing and come out of your shell and find happiness, joy, and companionship forever. What's the point of marriage? Many would say it's social stability or personal fulfillment.

Okay, now don't get me wrong as we think about those two answers. I actually think there's a good deal of truth in both of those answers. Both very broad statistical studies of married couples and also just personal anecdotes and stories support actually both of those things.

But here's what's very interesting. Neither of those things, according to our text tonight, is the ultimate point of marriage. Look again at verse 31.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Now Paul is quoting there Genesis chapter 2 verse 24. Genesis 2 verse 24 is sort of the key Old Testament verse that just defines marriage and shapes marriage for the rest of the biblical canon.

But according to Paul, what's the point of marriage? Verse 32. This mystery is profound. And I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

[7 : 01] Paul says marriage is a profound mystery. Now, by saying that marriage is a profound mystery, Paul does not mean that it's baffling and confusing.

Although many of us, both married and single, often find married life or thinking about married life baffling and confusing, that's not what he means by profound mystery here. Actually, when Paul says that marriage is a mystery and it's profound, mystery is actually a technical term for Paul. It's sort of a special part of Paul's vocabulary for talking about what? Talking about the gospel. For Paul, a mystery is something that's been unveiled that we didn't see before.

It's an element of what God has done in Christ or it's what God has done in Christ that wasn't so clear before, but now it's crystal clear because Christ has come. That's what a mystery is for Paul. Something that's been unveiled and now we see it for the first time and we never saw it before. And Paul says marriage is a profound mystery that refers to Christ in the church.

[8 : 12] In other words, the point of marriage all along from the very first marriage of Adam and Eve back in Genesis 2 all the way down through human history. What marriage has always been about, even though we didn't always see it at first as humans.

The point of marriage has always been to display, to refer, to give a tangible picture right here in our creaturely midst. It's always meant to refer and to point to Christ's love for his church.

So you see the point of marriage, the ultimate point of marriage, why God made marriage in the first place above all the other reasons, more than social stability, more than personal fulfillment, the point has always been to show us, to give us a picture and a pointer and a sign of Jesus' faithful love for his people.

Now, of course, as we said, marriage does bring a measure of those things, fulfillment and stability. But, you know, if you think about it, it can't actually deliver those things, can it? Marriage isn't strong enough by itself to make you fulfilled, right?

Marriage is not strong enough by itself to keep society from crumbling apart. Paul's showing us here something more profound. He's saying that marriage isn't something we were meant to look to. [9 : 43] It was something we were meant to look through. It wasn't something we were meant to look to for fulfillment, for stability. We were meant to look through it to the one who actually can bring us those things.

Too often we look to marriage to actually save us when we're supposed to look through marriage to the one who can, to the Savior. So the point of marriage is to display Christ.

Okay, let's take a couple minutes and let's apply that before we move on to the other things. Let's apply it first to those of us who are single. Think about it. What are you looking for or hoping for or praying for maybe in a potential marriage partner?

My guess is that social stability might not be the sort of top thing on your list. I'm really looking for a marriage partner so we can cure the ills of society together. Probably not. However, you're probably thinking about someone who's actually going to bring you a measure of personal fulfillment.

And don't hear me saying that that's not part of it, right? You should find a spouse who you can be friends with. You should find someone that you like.

[10 : 51] You should find someone who brings out the best in you. All of those things are true and good in their place. But at the end of the day, is it someone that you can display Christ with?

That's the question. What matters most isn't whether your spouse is your type, physically speaking, guys.

What matters most isn't whether your future spouse has a fabulous career and makes lots of money and is very socially connected. What matters most isn't that your spouse laughs at all your jokes and thinks that you're the cat meow.

What matters most is whether that future potential spouse loves Christ and whether together you can picture the love of Christ in your married life.

And as a sidebar, do you see now why the Bible is so adamant that believers only marry believers and not unbelievers?

[11 : 52] If the point of your marriage is ultimately this richly spiritual one to radiate out into the world a picture, a pointer of who Christ is and his deep love for the church, you're going to need someone that you're on the same page with spiritually to make that marriage really shine.

Is this someone you can display Christ with? There's another way I think this point about marriage applies to us when we're single.

And it's this. When we see that the point of marriage is actually to display the love of Christ for the church, it's a good reminder to us that if that's the point of marriage, then ultimately speaking, ultimately speaking, we're not missing out in our singleness.

This is what I mean. If the point of marriage is to point away from itself to the love of Christ for his church, if it's meant to refer us to that, to point us to that, then whether we're single or whether we're married, if we're in a relationship with Christ and the fellowship of his church, then we already have what marriage is meant to be all about.

We've already got the thing that it's pointing us to. So being single doesn't mean that you're a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God. Being single doesn't consign you to like the B team of church life and ministry.

[13 : 22] Now, I will be the first one to say, I know there are a lot of churches that can make people feel that way. You know, a friend just the other week was visiting a church where I won't mention where.

It was far away from here in the Midwest. You know, and she said the first thing that they asked her when she walked in was, Hi, how are you? Are you married? Do you have kids? It's like suddenly it

was like, whoa, like who am I?

It's just my marital status. Interestingly, if you read the New Testament, it blows that to smithereens. No, married, a fine way to serve Christ.

Single, a fine way to serve Christ. Christ, both of them relish in what we've got, which is everything in Christ. That's what it's all about. Some of my heroes, actually, spiritually speaking, were never married.

One of them is John Stott. I don't know if that's a name that's familiar to you all. He was a great 20th century British pastor and evangelist. He wrote something called the Lausanne Covenant, which was a very important evangelical statement of faith and mission in the 20th century.

[14 : 31] He published dozens and dozens of books on the faith and commentaries on the Bible. In fact, one of the best short commentaries on the book of Ephesians is written by John Stott. If you want to read one book on Ephesians, read what John Stott wrote because it's awesome.

In fact, I was reading a newer commentary this week and they kept referring to his commentary from like 20 years ago. That's how good it is. This guy led countless men and women to Christ through his ministry and it was actually international.

He was one of the first international evangelists, him and Billy Graham, actually. John Stott went to Australia and to Germany and to America, all over preaching Christ and God gave great fruit to his ministry.

He trained scores and scores of men and women for full-time Christian work and you know what? He was single an entire life. Never married. Being single doesn't put you on the B team in the church.

Now that's not to say that single life is easy. I'm not trying to make light of that. But I think what Paul's showing us here is that if you're in a relationship with Christ, you already have the substance of which marriage is the shadow.

[15 : 40] And perhaps what God is calling you to know and to experience tonight is how much you really do have in Christ. That you've got the thing in him.

Because one day, after all, marriage as an institution, friends, is going to fade away. When Christ returns and presents the church to himself without spot, without blemish in the new creation, human marriage is going to be no more.

Greg used a great illustration this morning of a candle and the sun rising. Look, you don't need a candle when the sun comes up. And we're not going to need marriage when the sun comes back. Trust me.

Because on that day, if you're already in Christ, if you're a part of his church, there's going to be a bigger marriage that you're a part of. And we're all going to experience that. We're all going to be a part of that.

And that's already guaranteed to you. You know, whether you have the poster on your wall or not, you've already got a ticket to the big event if you're in Christ.

[16 : 42] Okay, application number three. How about for us married folks? How does this point of marriage apply? Well, look, if the point of marriage is to picture Christ, then doesn't it seem obvious that we should look to Christ to learn how marriage is supposed to work?

After all, when you dump all the puzzle pieces out on the box onto the table, what's the first thing you do? You grab the top of the box, you prop it up, and then you start putting all the pieces together according to the picture that's on the box.

This is the picture these pieces are supposed to make. How silly would it be to dump all the puzzle pieces onto the table and start flipping through your smartphone to look for a cute picture to start making out of these pieces?

Oh, look, let's build this one. It's not going to work. No matter how much you want that puzzle of the Eiffel Tower to look like your kids eating an ice cream cone, it's not going to get put together that way, right?

In the same way, how silly is it for us to try to put our marriages together according to some other picture than the person of Christ? So, in other words, we look to Christ not only to find the point of marriage, what it's all about, but also to see the pattern of marriage.

[17 : 51] And that's the next big point that Paul shows us. What's the pattern of marriage? So, that's the point. What's the pattern? Look at verse 33. Paul says, however, he's kind of wrapping up here. Okay, here's my big point. Let each one of you, that is husbands, love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Okay, that's Paul's own summary of verses 22 through 30, where he gives extended instructions to both husbands and wives. Husbands, love your wives as yourself.

Wives, respect your husbands. There's the pattern in summary. But let's follow, let's follow Paul's order in his summary statement and let's consider more in detail.

So, let's follow his order and let's talk about husbands first. He says, husbands, love your wives. So, let's look at husbands first. That starts in verse 25. How are husbands to love their wives? Verse 25. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That's how husbands should love their wives. On the cross, Jesus gave himself up.

[18:55] Gave up his rights. Gave up his reputation. Gave up his comfort. Gave up his very life. So that you and I, his beloved, would flourish.

So that we could know life. And friends, that's how it's supposed to be with husbands. They must lay down their lives for the flourishing of their wives.

And Christ did this with our ultimate future in mind. Look at verses 26 and 27. Why did Christ lay down his life for us? Verse 26. That he might sanctify her.

That is, that he might set apart the church for God. Take her out of darkness and put her into light.

That he might sanctify her. Having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

Now, the word here is the word of the gospel. The good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul says, the gospel is like water for our souls. Washing us clean. So Christ died to wash us clean and to set us apart for God.

[19:51] But there's a future in mind. Looking ahead to the age to come, Paul says, Christ died, verse 27. 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.

And so, you see, husbands are to love their wives. Not with this life in view, but with eternity in view. One day, your spouse will be presented to Jesus.

Have husbands done everything in your power to get her to that last day? As spotless, as wrinkle-free as possible. Now, of course, you're not Jesus, husbands.

You can't wash away her sins. You can't sanctify her on your own strength. So how do you go about doing this? What does it look like to lay down your life to present her spotless on that last day? To be a part of what Jesus is doing in your spouse?

Look at verse 28 through 30. 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 nourishes and cherishes it.

[20:57] Just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body. Now, I want to zero in on those two verbs in verse 29. Nourish and cherish.

To nourish, what's that mean? It's to make sure you get what you need, right? What do you need? You need to eat. Make sure you're well-fed. Nourish something. You give it what it needs. What about cherish?

What does that mean? To prize and delight in something. To treat it as worthy and valuable. Now, husbands, think about your wife.

Think about all the aspects of her life. Think about her life physically, emotionally, relationally, vocationally, spiritually. Are you nourishing her?

Are you doing all that's in your power to make sure that her basic needs are met in all these areas? But not just that, are you cherishing her? Are you celebrating, delighting in the person God made her to be in all these areas?

[21:59] Take an example physically. Husbands, are you doing all that's in your power to nourish your wife physically? Are you working hard to provide food and shelter and clothing? Are you giving her the time and the space to exercise and take care of herself?

Do you put enough money in the monthly budget so she can actually get a haircut every once in a while and replace some of her old clothes? The reason I say that is because the first time Beth and I made a budget when we were engaged, I was the nerd in the relationship, so I was hammering out all the numbers.

I was crunching the numbers in our budget. I was like, this is going to be great. You know, here will be the budget for when we finally get married. And I think I put something like \$10 in the budget for toiletries and haircuts and that sort of stuff. I probably spent like \$10 a quarter.

So I'm like, \$10 a month. Boom. And I was living at home at the time. We were still engaged. I was living at home at the time. And my mom peeked over my shoulder as I was working on this one afternoon. And she said, Nick, yeah, \$10.

That's not going to cut it. She's going to need a little more than that for a haircut. I'm like, come on. Obviously, I was setting myself up for failure to nourish my wife physically, right? But Paul pushes us a little further.

[23 : 03] He says, more than that, do you cherish your wife physically? Do you prize how God made her? Do you delight in it? Do you call attention to it appropriately and praise how God made her? Not just nourish, but cherish.

Now start thinking through all the dimensions of your wife's life. How can I nourish her relationally? Am I interacting with her, talking with her, sharing my heart with her, making sure she has time to build good relationships? Am I nourishing her that way relationally?

How do I cherish her relationally? Do I praise her friendship with me? Do I value her insights, her humor? Do I let her know that they're good and they're delightful?

Do I lift up the way that she's a faithful friend to others? Do I point her to that and say, wow, you did such a good job interacting with that person. You've been such a faithful friend to so-and-so.

You get the picture, right? Now hash that out spiritually, vocationally. All of the dimensions. And if you start doing that, you realize that you need to lay down your life.

[24 : 10] And you need to put your agenda on hold. Because all of us naturally just, our minds run wild with how we can nourish and cherish ourselves. But Paul's saying, no, no, no, no, no.

Christ died for the church. You lay down your life for your spouse, for your wife. And that will be loving her with a Christ-like love. Okay, that's the pattern for husbands.

Now let's look at wives. Wives, respect your husbands, Paul says in verse 33. Well, what does that look like? Jump back to verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as the Lord. Okay, let's talk about the big fat elephant in the room. Submission is not a popular idea today, right?

In fact, I don't think it's an overstatement to say that submission is actually a hated idea today. We don't like the idea of submission at all. And you know, in fact, I can actually understand why we don't like it.

[25 : 16] Because on the one hand, human history, and even in the history of the church, there has been a lot of ungodly oppression and injustice and downright evil done in the name of submission.

And if you've experienced that, then let me say tonight, I am sorry that that has been your experience. And I'm actually glad you're here, giving Christianity a second chance.

Because that's not all, not at all, what Christ intends when he gives this message to wives.

Whatever that experience might have been, try to bracket that out for a second.

And realize that's not what Christ had in mind. And let's see what he does have in mind. And to do that, I want to put this call to submission in context. I want to sort of sketch out what's around it so that we understand what Paul's actually saying.

And to do that, I want to make four clarifying points about submission in this context. First, first clarifying point about a wife's submission. Look first at verse 21, right before our passage.

[26 : 25] There, Paul is ending some instructions to all Christians in the church. And Paul says that Christians are meant to be practicing mutual submission. Because we've all, men and women, been made in the image of God in creation.

And we've all, men and women, been made co-heirs with Christ in redemption. So you see, in creation and in redemption, according to the New Testament, there is equality of dignity and purpose and value.

And in that equality, we are to practice submission, deference, and respect to one another. And that mutual submission, that mutual dignity and respect is the soil out of which this particular submission of wives to husband grows.

That mutual submission, that mutual dignity and respect, it doesn't go away in marriage. It stays.

And out of that soil grows this particular dance of marriage.

Second. That's the first point. Second point. The submission of wives to husbands is not saying that every woman should submit to every man in this way. Paul's not saying every woman should submit to every man.

[27 : 41] Not at all, right? No. He is giving a very specific pattern for marriage. Not a pattern for everything and everywhere and everyone and every relationship.

This is a marriage reality between husbands and wives. Okay. Third. Though wives are called to a particular role in marriage, it doesn't mean they have lesser value in marriage.

And you know, in fact, it can't mean that. Paul calling wives to submit to husbands in marriage cannot mean that he thinks wives are of lesser worth or value than husbands.

Here's why. When Jesus came to earth, what was his relationship to the father like? Perfect submission. Jesus submitted perfectly to his father.

What do we know about Jesus' identity? Was Jesus, God the son, less God than God the father? Was his role in redemption of less value?

[28 : 46] Or did it make him of less value than the father? And the answer to those questions, friends, is a resounding, utter, and complete no. Jesus, God the son, and God the father, and God the holy spirit are completely equal in their deity.

Their roles in redemption are all of equal value and worth. In fact, what Jesus showed us was that submission could actually be a form of strength. That he brought all of his eternal deity to bear on the mission that the father had laid out for him.

And it wasn't a sign of weakness or a sign of inferiority. But it was actually a sign and a particular dignity and glory that he had. Okay? So third thing.

Calling wives to submit does not mean that wives are of lesser importance or value than husbands. Fourth. A wife's submission to her husband is obviously limited by what's pleasing to God.

If a husband asks a wife to do something that's against God's will or displeasing to God, then she has a duty to obey God rather than man. And not submit to that. Now maybe that seems pretty obvious to us.

[29 : 53] But it's worth saying, right? This is a sort of a finite submission under our total submission to God. Okay? So this isn't a carte blanche.

A sort of blank check between husbands and wives. No, no, no, no, no. We're still mutually submitting to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We're still absolutely submitting to God. And this thing grows up in between it.

Okay. There are the four clarifying points to put this kind of submission in context. But what does it mean practically? What does it mean positively? What does this submission mean?

What does it look like? Here's the best way I think I can get at this. Paul says, think about your husband like a head.

And this is what he means by that, I think. If Christ were to personally show up at your door tonight, and he would want a full report of how things are going, of how things are being done in your marriage in line with his kingdom and his grace, if Christ were to come knocking and he were to say, it's time to give an account, who would he look at first?

[31 : 02] The husband. That's what it means to be the head. The husband carries the weight of the responsibility before God of how that marriage is being lived out.

The buck stops with him. Now, that doesn't mean that the wife has no responsibility. Of course she does. Of course. But in God's ordering of the relationship, the husband is held to account first for the health of that marriage.

That's what it means to be the head. So wives, as you think of submission, think of it this way. Are you for your husband?

Are you doing your best to help him carry out that responsibility well? Are you bringing your gifts and your talents to bear, to build him up, to call forth his best?

Because here's the thing. Your husband needs your strengths. And he needs you to be on his team. Submission is not passivity.

[32 : 17] If there's anything we learn from Genesis 1 and 2, it's that the wife needs to bring her strengths to bear because God gives that couple a mission to multiply and create culture and do it all together.

And he says, you're going to need each other to do that. Submission isn't passivity. It's not saying, yes, dear, whatever you say. No, this is submission. It's saying, okay, tell me where we're going and I'm going to do my best to help us get there.

I'm in this. We're in this together and I'm for you and we're going to make this happen. I'm not going to hold back and I'm not going to have one foot for you and one foot against you.

That's what Paul means by saying that wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Not that wives should have no mind of their own, but that they should be all in. Just as the husband loves the wife in a comprehensive way, so the wife respects and supports and submits in a comprehensive way.

Now look, if your husband is planning to do something that's foolish, like spend all of your retirement money on some get rich quick scheme, what does submission look like?

[33 : 28] I think it looks like bringing all of your best gifts to bear to help him see that that's probably not the right thing to do. That's what real strong submission looks like in that moment. You're still for him, right?

And being for him in that moment looks like pleading with him, respecting him, not calling him an idiot, not saying you always do this with the money, but saying, look, I'm for you and I'm for us in this. I want us to flourish.

Can we think about the best thing to do here? Doing all that's in your power in that moment to help him not do something foolish, but to live into his calling as the one who bears the responsibility, ultimately, for that marriage to help him live that out well.

But you know, the reality is for most of us, day in and day out, the danger isn't, oh my goodness, my husband's going to do something really foolish, how do I stop him? I think the danger for most of us, day in and day out, is competition.

That is, we're always second guessing, we're always doubting, we're always maybe even undermining, we're always sort of one foot in, one foot out. And Paul's saying, no, no, no, no, no.

[34 : 36] Respect. Submit. Bring your best to bear in support. That's what strong submission looks like. Okay, so there's the pattern.

Love and respect. Now imagine if that's what our marriages were like. What if people looked at marriages in the church and here's what they saw.

They saw this dance where husbands were just constantly laying down their lives and thinking of ways that they could creatively, sacrificially, allow their wives to flourish.

And wives, sort of meeting that self-sacrificial love, were doing everything in their power and strength to help the husband lead well, guide well, set a vision well, carry that responsibility of headship well.

What if that's what people saw in marriages? Not fighting, not bickering, not me versus you, not 50-50, you do this, I do this, ooh, you didn't do that, and now I'm not doing this.

[35 : 45] No, what if they saw a marriage where it was all in? And that self-giving love and that strong submission actually wasn't contingent on the other person doing their part, but it was given unconditionally.

Notice that what Paul says here, he doesn't say to the husbands, hey husbands, this gives you the right to turn around and wail your wife every time, you know, she's not submitting. Why aren't you submitting better?

And it doesn't give the wife the right to turn around and say, why aren't you loving me sacrificial better? No, he's saying, focus on your own part of the dance. Husbands, don't think about how well your wife is submitting to you.

You've got enough to do by just loving your wife well. Wives, don't keep score with how well he's loving you. You've got enough to do to bring all your gifts to bear to make sure that he succeeds. You focus on doing your own jobs. And you know, 99% of the time, it's going to work itself out.

What if that's what people saw?

[36 : 54] Friends, I think they'd see a picture of Christ's love for his church. They'd see the mystery. They'd see the beauty of how faithful and unconditional and loving Christ is for us.

But of course, you don't need me to tell you that that pattern that we just sketched out for the last 15 minutes is immensely hard. Where do we get the power to actually do that?

Do we just sort of pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and say, I'm going to love like Christ today. I'm going to submit today. That'll last for a little while, but it'll run out.

Paul's got a better answer for us. And it's actually right before our passage. Look at verse 18. Verse 18.

This is the context. This is what leads up into Paul talking about husbands and wives. This is the precursor. This is the precondition of what's going to make this possible. He says, don't get drunk with wine for that is a botry, but be filled with the spirit.

[38 : 02] Be filled with the spirit. How are you going to live out this kind of marriage? Paul's saying, here's what you need. You need God himself living inside of you, working in you, filling you so that you can do this.

Tim Keller, who wrote a really great book on marriage, which is really just an exposition of this text, has a whole chapter called The Power for Marriage. And he makes the same point. And he says, what does the spirit do?

What's the ministry of the spirit? What does it look like to be filled with the spirit? And he says something really straightforward to help us understand it. He says, what the spirit does is that he makes the truth of Christ clear to our minds and real to our hearts.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to take the truth of who Christ is and what Christ has done and to make it clear to your mind so you understand it and to make it real to your heart so it burns inside of you.

And Paul's saying here, that's what we need. in order to step out of ourselves for our spouse, we need to see that Christ stepped out of himself for us.

[39 : 13] We need the spirit to take that truth and light it aflame in our hearts. We need to see that this is what Jesus has done for us.

And we need to see that in Christ there's an even greater wedding to come. This is what we talked about at the very beginning. Because you know, friends, if every wedding, if every marriage is about the history of redemption, if every marriage points to Christ, you know, the history of redemption is also about a marriage.

Think about it. God creates a human couple in the garden. Why does he create them? To bear his image, but ultimately so that he would have fellowship with them. So they would walk with him and know him in the cool of the day and so that he could say to them, I'll be your God.

And you be my people. And then when that goes totally awry, when they decide that they'd rather serve themselves and serve other gods than him, what does God do?

Like a faithful spouse, he comes after them. And he comes after them first in the person of Abraham. He says, Abraham, I'm going to bless your family and through your family I'm going to bless everyone else.

[40 : 25] And the family that crops up is what? Is Israel. And you know how God relates to Israel, how he calls himself in relationship to Israel throughout the Old Testament? He says, I'm your husband and you're my lover and I love you with an undying love and I'm going to be your God and you're going to be my people.

And you know what happens throughout the Old Testament? They choose other lovers and they turn away and like a wayward spouse they just keep fleeing after other lovers. And then there's this prophet that comes along in the 8th century named Hosea.

And God says, okay Hosea, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go out and I want you to marry someone and she's going to cheat on you and she's going to run from you and she's going to give herself to prostitution and then here's what I want you to do.

I want you to go and I want you to buy her back and I want you to keep loving her. And I want you to keep being faithful to her. because I want my people to see through you what I'm like.

And God says in Hosea, here's what I'm going to do to you. I'm going to woo you, my people, back out into the wilderness and I'm going to reaffirm my love for you. And about 800 years after Hosea, you know what happens?

[41 : 36] A prophet shows up in the middle of the wilderness screaming, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. And then who comes after John the Baptist? Jesus. You know how Jesus talks about himself?

He says, I'm a bridegroom and I've come for my bride. And he dies. Yeah. And he cleanses all of our sin.

He brings us home. And then Jesus says, ah, I've got something even better in store for you because when I come back, I'm going to put all this sin and all this death away.

And at that moment, even though you've been wandering through the wilderness church and even though you've wondered where I am and even though you've constantly questioned whether I will really be your God and whether you will really be my people, when I come back, we're going to throw a party.

And in that moment, you're going to be roped in white with my own righteousness and you're going to know that you have been the thing that's driven me from day one to have you, my church, with me for eternity.

[42 : 43] And at the marriage supper of the Lamb, we're going to feast and we're going to be with Christ forever and then you know what's going to happen? We're going to rule and reign with him. That's how the book of Revelation ends.

We're going to see his face and they reign with him forever. That Christ is going to have his bride and together we're going to shine the image of God throughout the new creation and we're going to create culture and we're going to see peace and we're going to see God's glory cover the world like the waters cover the sea.

That through that man, Jesus Christ, and through that woman, his bride, God's purposes are going to be fulfilled. Friends, that's what marriage is all about. That's what the history of redemption is all about.

That's the story you're a part of. So when Christ asks you to say, hey, stay single for me. Wait, be patient.

Do you know what you have in store for you? A wedding and a feast that will blow your mind. And when Christ says to you, hey, I want you to lay down your life for your wife. I want you to, I want you to lay down your life for your husband.

[43 : 56] Okay, Lord, what you've done for me can't even touch what you're asking me to do for my husband, for my wife. Gladly I will do it. Because I know what's in store and I know what you promise.

And all your ways are good. So friends, when the Spirit takes that truth of the Bible, when he lights that up in your heart, that's what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

When in prayer, when in worship, when in the hearing of his word, when the Spirit takes that and lights it up inside of you, then you can live out the pattern, whether married or single, and then we start to display the point of this whole thing.

Then the mystery starts to get seen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for the gift of marriage.

And Lord, thank you for your word that teaches us what marriage is all about. And God, thank you so much that you give us your Spirit so that we can live out these things. And Lord, now as we come to your table, as we remember all that you've done for us, God, we pray, Jesus, we pray that your Spirit would come and take these elements and make the gospel real to our hearts.

[45 : 16] We need you to do this, Lord, for us. Amen. Well, friends, we're going to go ahead and we're going to move to communion now. We're going to take the Lord's Supper together. One of the things we've decided to do as a church is to celebrate the Lord's Supper more regularly.

So if you're thinking to yourself, wait a second, it's not the first Sunday of the month. Why are we doing communion? Did someone make a mistake? No, we're going to start doing it twice a month because we think that these are gifts that Christ gave to his church, not because they're magic or anything, but because this is a tangible way for you to remember all that Jesus has done for you. Right? We talked a lot about Jesus being the true bride, the true groom, the true bridegroom, the true spouse. And look what he's done for you. His body's been broken for you. His blood has been shed for you. He's risen again. This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians.