

## “Relationships In Christ: Marriage”

18 October 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### Welcome & Call To Worship:

**Hymn of Preparation:** Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession:** Aderval Mendonça

**Reading:** Ephesians 5:21-33

### Sermon:

In this section, Paul continues to teach the Church about life in Christ, how to live a life of love, a life that pleases God. And to do so, he encourages us by the command to “be filled with the Spirit” (v.17). Having the Holy Spirit leads us to a life of singing, thanking and submission. Submission is surprising, jarring even, but we are reminded this is the life for every believer (v.21). Each of us is to submit to Christ and this will influence every part of life and every relationship.

#### I. Relationships in Christ

- A. Household Rules:** Each of the pastoral letters have sections called household codes/rules. These were included, because being a Christian had brought about radical changes in relationships and responsibilities. Contrary to what we might think or assume, being a Christian resulted in increased freedoms and an increased focus on women. Paul’s concern is to teach about these relationship responsibilities, these household rules, so that the Christian faith would not be reproached, “*so that no-one would malign the word of God*” (Titus 2:5).
  
- B. Modelled on Jesus and the Church:** Paul does this by modelling his theology on the relationship of Jesus with the Church. Marriage is traced back to before the fall, in the beginning. Those who are married are to know that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Jesus and the Church. In fact, as you read this passage it is hard to unpick the different parts of the husbands’ and wives’ responsibilities from Jesus and the Church, his work and her responsibility, they are so intertwined. Having just stated the Creation rule and command about marriage (v.31), Paul says, “look, even though I have been talking about husbands and wives, I have been talking about Christ and the Church” (v.32). This is a profound, deep and important mystery - that is, revelation from God. Marriage is based upon, highlights, and is a picture of the relationship Jesus has with the Church.

This is, therefore, profoundly important. The goal of our marriages is not, therefore, primarily about companionship, sexual union, or having children; the goal of our marriages is to model and mirror the relationship Jesus has with the Church. Nothing could be as important. Sadly, as you know, marriage is under threat in Irish society for a variety of reasons. However, if marriage is a picture of Jesus’ love for the Church and her reciprocal response of submission, then the tragedy of marriage breakdown, its ridicule and redefinition, is profoundly serious. It fails to model Jesus’ love for His church, it undermines the most important building block in society, and we must be concerned. We must rethink and give ourselves wholeheartedly to this

relationship of marriage as directed by God. Paul understood this and that is why he included such teaching within his letters to the churches.

- C. A Work of the Holy Spirit:** To live as we are being asked to, we will need the help of the Holy Spirit. Remember we noted that being filled with the Holy Spirit is expressed in submission to one another out of reverence for Christ. Human love is a great thing, being deeply moved because of the attractiveness of another, but sadly such love will not sustain over the years. Recognition of this throws us on the grace of God who gives us more of the Holy Spirit and fills us with a deeper reverence for Christ and love for the other. The help of the Holy Spirit is essential if we are to live in our marriages as God intended; a loving, secure, encouraging, flourishing, and exciting relationship to be in. Marriage is good, marriage is important, marriage is a wonderful picture of Jesus' love for the Church and the Church's submission and respect for Him. As such, God is fully committed to making our marriages work and thrive in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## II. Husbands & Wives

- A. Wives submit to your husbands (v.22-24):** This literally means “arrange under” or “put themselves under”. It is voluntary, as we all do in relation to the Lord Jesus.

***The husband is the head of the wife.*** This is boldly stated and you may be aware that much discussion has been had on the Greek word *kephale* used here - does it mean source, as in the head (source of a river), or does it mean authority? The strong evidence is towards authority. Therefore, wives are to submit to, put themselves under, the authority of their husbands in everything. This is as the Church submits to the headship of Jesus

Note that when speaking of the Church, Jesus is the Saviour. The temptation of some is to equate the husband as saviour; however, the text is clearly not saying that. Even though the husband models Christ, he is not and never can be an equivalent.

- B. Husbands love your wives (v.25-29):** The word for love is *agape*, a divine love, a love that doesn't come from ourselves. Love is the key reality that helps us understand the intention and outworking of husbands having authority in marriage. The authority is given by God to husbands in order that they would love their wives. Or put negatively, it is *not* given to lord it over her, to command, or God forbid, to abuse, though we must recognise that it has been used to do so. If any of us *ever* say to our wives, “*you are to submit,*” then I contend we are not loving and are in the wrong; never say it! You are to love! Most writers agree that the command to love is probably as difficult as ,or more difficult than, the command to submit. Klyne Snodgrass says, “*a priority is placed on the husband, but contrary to the society, the priority is for the benefit of the wife.*”

The qualities of a husband's *agape* love are noted in the life of Jesus and His relationship with the Church, which Paul outlines next.

***Gave himself up for her.*** Self-giving. He looks out for her needs. This can lead us in a myriad of ways of practical, sacrificial love.

**To make her holy.** Sanctified, set apart, seeking her growth in holiness, teaching her the word of God. The desire of a Christian husband is to see his wife grow in love for, and in the character of, the Lord Jesus. He encourages her in the word of God; he facilitates her in Christian growth; he disciplines her. I say again that holiness - having the fruit of the Spirit - is beautiful, and it is the loving desire of a husband for his wife that she is encouraged to be holy.

**Caring for her as he does his own body.** It is self-evident, says Paul, that we care for our own bodies and their needs, and similarly we are to care for the needs of our wives.

In summary, I was struck by this equation: **Authority + Love = Responsibility.**

You may be thinking I haven't said much about the wives' responsibility to submit and I know I haven't, but that is simply the weight of the text and why we submit to Christ. We are aware of His authority and love and we appreciate the responsibility He took for our salvation and granting us eternal life and we know that submission to such a person is safe and sensible.

### **C. Unity & Intimacy Within Marriage (v.30-32)**

Marriage is consummated when sexual union has occurred; it is a beautiful reality that pictures our union with Christ. Ephesians has a lot to say about our being "in Christ". The intimacy, the connection, the deep satisfaction of sexual intimacy, which is love, reminds us of what we have in Christ, in the gospel and in the Church. It is anchored in the truth of creation, and in the gospel. It brings what has been divided together and it is a picture of what we expect in heaven. Jesus taught us that marriage is a temporary reality and death sadly reminds us of that fact. Marriage is temporary, because it is surpassed and perfected in Christ in the new heaven and earth - deep, intimate, satisfying unity with the Trinity and the Church. It is the final picture given in the Bible of heaven: a marriage between Jesus and the Church.

#### **Revelation 21:1-5**

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

### **III. Common Questions**

Questions are often asked of this passage because of the biblical understanding of submission and headship (authority with love). I have taken three questions from a book by Kathleen Nielson, but they are representative of questions asked in most books dealing with this passage and subject.

- *Isn't it true that in Christ there is no male or female (Gal 3:28)? Doesn't that truth cancel the command for wives to submit?*

This question considers the fact of our oneness in Christ, see also v.30, "*we are all members of His body.*" Being one in Christ, we are all equal. In terms of our standing before Christ there is no difference; males and females are equal before God. Yet though every part is equal, the body metaphor recognises the reality of different body parts, each with different functions and order. That the hand has a different function to the eye, for example, is self-evident. Indeed, that is the beauty of this teaching. With differences, we are all equal in our value as created and redeemed human beings.

The Bible affirms that equality doesn't mean there cannot be different functions. The supreme example of this is the Lord Jesus Himself who, though equal to the Father, took the role of a servant and did all that His Father asked of Him. The Bible's teaching on the Trinity outlines equality with unity and different functions perfectly.

The idea of order applies in every walk of life, as these household codes affirm, and they facilitate the ordering of society.

- *Are these commands simply an expression of the sexist society surrounding Paul and no longer apply?*

The answer to this is firstly to see where Paul's argument starts and his use of Genesis 2:24 in v.31. The argument starts in Creation before the Fall, before society. This is the blueprint, the way God intended marriage to be and it continues. Jesus also affirmed this definition of marriage in Matthew 19 when asked a question about divorce. Therefore, God's plans for marriage were not culturally set or bound and therefore apply in every culture and country since time began.

The second way to answer this is to recognise, as I said in the introduction, that Paul's instructions were radically different to the disordered (sexist) society of his day. In the Christian view of marriage, wives were not property, nor child producers, nor forbidden to be educated or work outside the home.

- *But doesn't this mean that women will just be a doormat and never work outside the home, for example?*

I was once not allowed to do the dishes in a Christian household because I was a man. Even at the age of 21 I knew that was nonsense. I have been keen to not make any applications for husbands and wives, as Paul does not do so either. Our primary task is to live positively under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is the quality of this life that flows out into every other relationship. We are instructed to find out what pleases the Lord (v.10) and understand what the Lord's will is (v.17), but we are not told how this applies in specific situations. We need to discuss this and listen and think through what God is saying and then together agree to support each other in living it out. You can do that in your 3D groups and in your existing relationships.

In the Creation account, Eve is created to be a suitable helper for Adam (Gen 2:20), as none was found among the animals. It struck me afresh that suitable help within one marriage may be very different within another, when worked out with a

submissive attitude and discussed in the context of love for the one who is asked to submit.

In answering our questions, we use these principles and apply them consistently to the situations raised. We do so humbly, asking God for help. There is blessing in being open and honest about this relationship and making every effort to work out what pleases the Lord. May God help us to do so well. And as Paul finishes, he reminds us, *“Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband”* (v.33).

**Hymn of Reflection:** IPH 542 I Will Offer Up My Life

**Prayers for Others:** Anne Gillanders

**Announcements**

**Closing Hymn:** IPH 487 And Can It Be

**Benediction;** And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.