

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 24

Marriage And The Mystery Of The Gospel

November 10th, 2013

Ephesians 5:22-33

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:22-33. This is really part two of the message I preached last week. Last week we read this passage and discussed it according to the primary thrust of Paul's argument. Paul has been developing a theme since way back in verse 18. He's been talking about the results of being ever filled with the Holy Spirit. He talked first about what the Spirit filled church would look like when it gathered for worship, then he began to talk about what the Spirit filled church would look like when it scattered – each person to their own home. He began by talking about marriage. What does a Spirit filled marriage look like? He told us that it looked like a wife submitting as the church submits to Christ and it looks like a husband loving as Christ loved the church. That was the main point that Paul was making but it was clear to us as we read that that Paul was also working an ancillary point. That point comes to the fore in verses 30-32:

³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (ESV)

I mentioned last week that Paul lands his whole teaching on marriage in a quotation from Genesis 2:24. There is a sense in which everything he has said has been a sermon on what it means for the two to become one flesh and YET Paul says the real meaning of that text, the ULTIMATE meaning is the mystery that the church is the body and bride of Christ. Do you see that? “I am

saying that it – the two shall become one flesh – refers to Christ and the church. I am saying that Genesis 2:24 refers to Christ and the church. It looks forward to the covenant love of God for his people and their faithful and obedient response. We are after all members of his body. Now, we normally do not hear the word “body” as being synonymous with the word “bride” but in this sense it is. We know this if we know our Bibles. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:

⁴For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7:4. ESV)

The husband’s body belongs to the wife; the wife’s body belongs to the husband. In the Biblical sense then, the wife is the husband’s body which he is to love instinctively as an extension of himself. Now let me carefully bring this down to street level. When a husband is loving his wife and he looks down at her he says to himself: “This is my body. This is provided for me. I must care for this woman – she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” The bride is the husband’s body. This is true in marriage BUT Paul says, it ultimately refers to Christ and the church. When you think of the church as “the body of Christ” I bet you think that means we are his hands and feet. That is not what it means. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that. We say that but the Bible never does. It means that we are the Bride – the wife of God.

This is a great mystery, Paul says in verse 32. In Ephesians the word “mystery” always refers to something previously in shadow that is now being clearly revealed. It refers to revelation and illumination. Paul is saying that a Spirit filled marriage reveals/casts light upon - **preaches** the Gospel of Christ. Do you see that? All of this talk about how husbands should do this and how wives should do that – all of that talk is important, it really is – God wants you to be blessed and his ways are best – but even more than that, Paul says, I wanted to teach on that because a Spirit filled marriage PREACHES THE GOSPEL!!

That hit me on Tuesday. When I saw that I immediately asked: “Who is this sermon for? If who I am as a husband preaches the Gospel, who will hear that sermon?” Most of you would really have no idea who I am as a husband and no idea who Shauna Lee is as my wife – who will be impacted by this acted sermon? The answer of course is; most immediately – my children. That’s what hit me. I’ve never really seen that before. I’ve always understood that who I am as a dad will have a huge impact on how my kids see and imagine God. I know that and so I try to

very intentionally manifest the character of God as a dad. I try and balance HOLINESS and LOVE. I try to set a high moral bar and enforce consequences and teach discipline so that my kids won't be shocked to discover God has rules and that he expects us to follow those rules. I try to be gentle and affectionate and loving so that they won't think of God as a harsh and distant cosmic police officer. I try and balance GRACE and TRUTH as a dad because I know that who I am as a father will have an immense impact on how my kids instinctively imagine God. I know that but I don't think I knew this. I don't know that I've ever put a lot of thought into what I'm saying about God through the way I husband my wife. That sent me into a bit of a panic and I went back to my list from last week to see how well I was actually doing at that. It raised the stakes for me. Obviously I know that I have to be a good husband for Shauna Lee's sake and I know that I will have to answer to God for how well I've taken care of his daughter – I know that so I wasn't UNMOTIVATED on this issue but all of the sudden I realized that in all likelihood my children's eternal destiny was somewhat riding on who I am as a husband and who my wife is as a wife.

That hit me! That raised the stakes for me. Listen let me touch a deep nerve for just a second here. This church is full of Christian men and women in their 50's and 60's who love the Lord and who deeply mourn over the fact that their grown children have walked away from the faith. This is a deep hurt in our church as it is in many churches. In the 1980's we thought that the problem was the music so we made changes and invested in cooler music. That didn't work. In the 90's we thought the problem was the language and ethos in the church so we went seeker friendly and hip and relevant. That didn't work. But maybe, maybe the problem was never in here. Maybe the problem wasn't the Spirit filled church GATHERED to worship – maybe the problem was the Spirit filled church scattered at home. Maybe it wasn't the music that turned off our kids, maybe it was the marriage. I don't want that for myself. Nothing terrifies me more than my kids walking away from Christ and spending eternity in hell. So I'm highly motivated this morning to go back over this passage and to think now in terms of what my marriage preaches to my kids. So let's read the text again with an eye towards how we as husbands and how we as wives PREACH THE GOSPEL to our kids. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so 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. ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Don't look at the clock and worry that we haven't hit any of our bullet points. We did all our exegesis homework last week so we are going to move through those points very quickly. If you weren't here last week, get the message off the website. Last week we explained what all this stuff means, now we are simply looking back at that and asking what am I as a husband teaching my kids about Christ? What am I as a wife teaching my kids about responding to Christ as a Christian? Let's start with the husbands.

As A Husband I Want My Kids To See The Love Of Jesus Reflected In My...

1. Costly, self sacrificing love for their mother

The love of Christ for the church is supremely revealed in his death upon the cross.

⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8. ESV)

God shows his love through self sacrificial giving. For God so loved the world that he GAVE. I want my children to see that reflected – however dimly, however imperfectly – in my love for my wife. I want them to see that I pay myself last. I don't want them to see me spending big money on toys for myself – golf clubs, ski doos, motorcycles – while my wife is holding down a part time job so that she can buy school clothes for the kids! I don't want that! I want them to see me taking personal responsibility for the generous provision of their mom. I want them to say in their little brains: “My daddy works real hard and comes home late and is even too tired sometimes to play, because he really loves my mom.” I want them to see that. I want your kids to see that dads. Dads, I'm begging you right now to grow up, to put away your stupid toys and to provide for your wife. If your wife needs to have a job outside the home then you have no

right to any toys! If you make enough for your wife to stay home with the kids and be the woman God called her to be and you still have enough left over for a new gun and a new four wheeler and a motorcycle – then praise God, you must be rolling in it, but if you’re wife has to work because your money goes to the toy box instead of the bread box then you are sinning and you are misrepresenting the love of God to your children.

Secondly, as a husband I want my kids to see the love of Jesus reflected in my...

2. Exclusive commitment to their mother

I want my kids to see that I am only interested in their mother. I have no girlfriends on the side, no women whose conversation or company I find more interesting, no woman whose meals I prefer, no women whose body is more appealing. Obviously that means that we don’t visit strip bars or have posters hanging in our workrooms. It means we are very careful about what we watch on TV. Your kids, particularly your sons, need to know that you find their mother satisfying and consumingly attractive. They need to know that you are into mom. If mom has red hair then you are into red heads. If mom is tall then you are into tall. If mom is short then you’re into short. They need to know that MOM is all the woman you can handle and all the woman you can think about.

They need to know that your love for mom doesn’t go up and down with her performance. They need to see you fuss over mom as much when she’s young and skinny as you do when she’s older and less so. They need to see fuss over mom when she’s healthy and when she’s laid up. That will prepare them for the electing love of God. God loved you from before the foundation of the world – before you did anything good or bad. Dads if you model a performance based love for mom you will obscure and poison their grasp of the Gospel.

Thirdly, as a husband I want my kids to see the love of Jesus reflected in my...

3. Faithful ministry of the Word to their mother

Paul referred to how Christ set the church aside for himself through the washing of the Word:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so 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. (Ephesians 5:25-27. ESV)

According to the Bible, the Word saves and the Word sanctifies. In Romans 10 we read:

¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17. ESV)

James 1 says:

receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21. ESV)

The ministry of the Word saves! As the Word is sown over a human heart the Holy Spirit takes that seed and presses it home and does a miracle of regeneration and the seed takes root and brings life! Being born again is a miracle of the Spirit and the Word! The Word also sanctifies, Jesus said that in John 17:

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17. ESV)

I want my kids to look at my priestly ministry in the home and see me washing my wife in the Word such that she is solidly planted in the Gospel and growing up in every way into Christ. I want them to see that and to see in that the mystery of Christ's love for the church.

Men, again I plead with you to become students and teachers of the Word. Let your children see you wrestling with the Word when they awake. When your children come down the stairs at 6:30 in the morning let them find you at the table with the Word of God open and a highlighter in your hand. Let them watch you wash your wife and them in the Word day after day towards the end of a saved and sanctified home.

Fourthly, as a husband I want my kids to see the love of Jesus reflected in my...

4. Tender consideration of their mother

God's love for his covenant bride is gentle. The Scriptures say:

the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13-14. ESV)

Jesus likewise weeps over Jerusalem:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matthew 23:37. ESV)

Men of this church, our children should see our tender consideration for our wives and it should prepare them to entrust themselves to a God who loves them with gentleness and compassion. If we treat our wives as employees or business partners we rob our children of the peace and joy that comes from knowing the gentle care of the Lord. How can they imagine a God that is simultaneously Sovereign and Majestic and yet who is also like a mother hen or a fussing nurse if they have never seen us fuss or gently brood over our wives? You are the strongest man they know; let them also see that you are gentle and kind and considerate.

Wives, what should our children learn about responding to Christ from observing how you respond to your husband? According to this passage, they ought to see...

As Children Watch Their Mom Respond To Their Dad They Ought To See ...

1. The wisdom of glad submission

Our children ought to be confirmed in their faith by comparative observation. They live in a culture of “lean in” insanity where most moms are trying to be amazing women and amazing men and they are ending up exhausted, unhappy, frustrated, angry and confused. It turns out you can’t have your cake and eat it too. You can’t do it all, you can’t be independent AND intimate. You can’t be a high powered CEO AND bake cookies with your kids after school. Its a myth and a lie and a heartbreaking snare to most of the women they will meet and know in life. They ought to look at them and then they ought to look at you and they ought to see the wisdom of glad submission. They ought to see how you are blessed. They ought to see your decision to be a mom and a wife and to respect your husband and to let him do what God called him to do while you do what he called you to do and they ought to see the peace in that, the rest, the harmony and

the wholeness. Make sure moms, that your kids grow up thinking that this is the smartest plan in the world.

About a year ago our daughter Mikayla paid Shauna Lee the highest compliment a daughter can pay to her mother. We asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up and without hesitation she said: “I want to be a mom just like mommy”. That’s high praise. Make sure your kids see the wisdom of glad submission.

Secondly as children watch their mom respond to dad they ought to see:

2. The beauty of intuitive partnership

I took some ribbing last week because I told a little story at RCC about how my mom who was very skilled in ball room dancing used to give me impromptu lessons in the family room as a young boy. I’ve forgotten most of what she taught me but one thing I will never forget is the sight of my parents floating around the room at my older brother’s wedding. My parents own the dance floor. My mom told me the secret of beautiful ballroom dancing: the man leads and the woman anticipates. The better a woman knows her man, the more beautiful the dance they dance. Paul said it this way when talking about the church:

try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:10. ESV)

A good church studies the Lord so as to anticipate his will. A good wife likewise studies her husband to anticipate his will. Wives, show your children the beauty of anticipation and intuitive partnership. Show them that you know what dad needs before HE KNOWS what dad needs. Show them what it is to know your husband so well that you can finish his sentences and perfect his thoughts. Prepare them to respond to the Lord that way. Teach them that submission is not a demotion – it is a dance.

Thirdly, and lastly, as children watch their mom submit to dad they ought to see:

3. The joy of grateful response

Wives, if you submit to your husband begrudgingly or with sighs and groans too deep for words – you are hindering the future worship of your children. You are showing them that obedience and joy don't go together. You are teaching them to resent the leadership and Sovereignty of God. A woman who resents the headship of her husband ought not to be surprised when her children throw off the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Rather, model for your children how to be thankful in everything. Thank your husband for working long hours rather than berating him for coming home late. Thank him for cutting the grass and using his Saturday to unclog toilets and clear leaves out of gutters. Let the children hear you do that and you will be teaching them how to worship. Joy does not begin in the gathered church – joy is learned in the scattered church. It is learned at home as children watch mothers who respond to their husbands with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Questions and Anticipations:

In another time and another place that might be where the sermon would end, but in 21st century Orillia, you know as well as I do that we cannot end here. Many of you have been sitting patiently for 35 minutes with a question burning on your heart that has to be addressed. For some of you the question is phrased this way:

Q1. What if I don't have a dad? What if my dad never treated my mom in this way?

Some of you will frame that question in these words:

Q2. What if I'm a single parent? What if I don't have a husband/wife?

Regardless of how the question is framed the concern is the same: Am I doomed to a life of constantly misunderstanding God? Will I ever be able to know him as he is and respond to him as I should? Are my kids doomed to perpetual and everlasting confusion? Will they ever see God and love him? Those are real questions – HUGE QUESTIONS - and we need to take a minute and think about them. First of all I think we need to acknowledge that we live in a fallen world. Things are not as they were meant to be. Paul seems to be suggesting that God created marriage in Genesis as a mysterious anticipation of Christ's covenantal love for his chosen

people. However, as we read Genesis we see that one of the first things affected by the fall was covenantal marriage. So we are all dealing with flawed marriages – flawed moms and dads who did not perfectly reflect the love of Christ for the church. Lets also recognize that for some the picture is not merely flawed, it is obliterated. There was no dad or dad was a monster – what then? This is where we give thanks for the Holy Spirit. The truth is that no one is capable of seeing Jesus in the flesh. Jesus said in John 3 that we have to be born again by the Spirit to see the kingdom. That means for everyone – whether they had a good dad or a bad dad they need a miracle to see and believe the Gospel. Your miracle might need to be bigger than my miracle. I had a pretty good dad but I still needed a miracle to see the Gospel! The miracle is always big enough for your brokenness. No one's brokenness is bigger than God's miracles.

Secondly I would say that this is where we give thanks for the church. The church is a family of families so where your family is broken you can borrow wholeness from somebody else. Let me give an example. If you are a single mom in this church trying to raise kids who have no idea what a good dad looks like and who have never seen a man treat a woman with tenderness and sacrifice – you need to expose your kids to families that do have that! That's the whole reason we started the Family Foundations program at RCC! Get your kids there! We eat a meal together as multiple families around a table. We do family devotions there so that your kids can see a real dad disciplining his kids and instructing his family. Come! Let your kids see that. This can be one of the ordinary ways that God does extraordinary work to restore your family in the Gospel.

Conclusion:

Men and women – I urge you to consider the stakes. The Apostle Paul was concerned to teach this material not primarily so that you and your spouse could enjoy each other a little more – that's good and that's wonderful but his primary agenda here was helping you conduct yourself as a husband and helping you conduct yourself as a wife SUCH that the Gospel is accurately proclaimed in your home. Very few people are going to hear that sermon but all of the people you love the most are going to hear it loud and clear. This is the Gospel and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.