

The Church's Married People

Ephesians 5:15-33

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Introduction:

Today in our sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life* we will be looking at the church's married people.

- I realise that marriage is not exactly a *stage* of life, so perhaps we could say *The Christian in the Married State*.
 - It is not a state that everyone enters into, but it is certainly a state in which every Christian should take a great interest.
 - As believers, we are to take interest not only in ourselves, but also in others.
 - We are to see what God has called our brothers and sisters to be in their stage of or state of life, and we are to rejoice as we see Christ in them in that state.
 - Seeing the beauty of Christ in each other has been a focus in this series...
 - We saw that the Christian infant is a picture of receptivity of God's Word.
 - The Christian child exhibits obedience to the rest of us.
 - The Christian young adult exhibits strength and zeal in the service of Christ.
 - Marriage itself, as we will see today, exhibits the beauty of the relationship between Christ and His church.
 - We are going to look at this today, and then next week we will focus on wives and then on husbands the week after that.

For our scripture reading on marriage, I have chosen Ephesians 5:15-33.

- I have chosen this passage because it especially focuses on how the marital union of a husband and wife is analogous to the union of Christ and His church.
- Please give careful attention to the reading of God's word... Ephesians 5:15-33.

Ephesians 5:15-33: See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God. ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands,

church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects *her* husband."

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

I. The first thing I want you to notice from our text is that marriage is a picture of the relationship of Christ and the church.

A. This is very clear.

1. Notice how many times the word “as” is used in drawing this comparison...
 - in verse 22—wives are to submit to their husbands **as** to the Lord...
 - in verse 23—the husband is head of the wife **as** also Christ is head of the church...
 - in verse 24 the **as** comes at the beginning—**as** the church is subject to Christ so let wives be to their own husbands.
 - in verse 25—husbands love your wives just **as** Christ loved the church.
2. Now look at verse 28—it begins with the word “so”
 - In verse 25-27, Paul has just explained how Christ gives Himself wholly to do good for the church as her head...
 - He goes way out of His way to rescue her from her totally ruined condition...
 - He loves her so much that He did what was necessary to secure her pardon and cleansing—
 - He gives Himself wholly do good for her...
 - And then, after showing all that love He exercised for His church,
 - Paul says,
 - **so...** husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies.

B. Understand that marriage is always a picture of the relationship of Christ and the church.

1. It may be a *good* picture or it may be a *bad* picture, but it always a picture.
 - In other words, living badly in marriage does not make it a picture of something else—it is still a picture of Christ and the church—just as a bad painting of you is still a painting of you.
 - Paul is showing us how Christian marriage is to stand out as a good picture of the relationship of Christ and the church.
2. In truth, even before the fall, marriage was a picture of the relationship we had at that time with the Son of God—not as Saviour, but as our God and Lord.
 - He is the One within the Trinity who is the Word of God—the One among the Trinity in particular who reveals the Godhead to us.
 - We were called (and we did it beautifully before the fall) to live in harmony with Him as our head as He gave Himself to us.
 - Adam and Eve were brought together as husband and wife to live in harmony with each other the way the Son of God lived in harmony with them.

TRANS> What is it about marriage that makes it structurally like our relationship with Christ? That is what I want to look at secondly.

II. Marriage is like the church's relationship with Christ in that both relationships involve unity with headship.

A. First, let's look at how both relationships involve unity—bringing two (or more) together as one.

1. Paul reminds us in verse 31, that in marriage,
 - as it was instituted by God from the very beginning,
 - a man and a woman become one flesh.
 - Verse 31 is a quote from Genesis 2:24 saying that two become one by it:
 - **Eph 5:31: For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**
- a. It should be understood that this oneness is what we might call a legal bond or a covenant bond...
 - When you sign a legal document—such as on a loan to purchase a car,
 - you are joined together with the creditor so that you have obligations to him by law.
 - You are legally joined together so that a portion of your future income belongs to the creditor.
- b. In the same way, marriage creates a covenantal bond between a man and a woman, only it binds their lives together in a very close intimacy...
 - 1) It is referred to in the scriptures as a covenant of companionship...
 - For example, in Malachi 2, the Lord charges men who had divorced their wives because, He says,
 - **“she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”**
 - He calls it treachery to break this bond of marriage.
 - 2) This covenant of companionship creates a relationship that is even greater than the relationship between parent and child...
 - A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife...and the two become one flesh.
 - This is a relationship can never to be broken without injustice.
 - It is properly an intimacy that brings a man and woman together in such a way that their lives are truly bound up together...
 - so that what the one does affects the other,
 - so that the needs of one become effectively the needs of the other...
 - they are intimately tied together socially, physically, financially, politically, and even spiritually so that what one does affects the other.
 - c. Sexual intimacy is involved in their union...
 - 1) In 1 Cor 6, Paul even says that a man who takes a prostitute is made one with her...
 - His problem in such a relationship is that by engaging in sexual intimacy with her,
 - he takes what belongs only to marriage and brings it into a relationship where God has not authorised such intimacy.

- He is, in a sense, tearing himself apart by becoming one with someone with whom he has no covenant bond...
 - He is ignoring God's requirement to live in a permanent bond with the one he has intimate relations with.
- 2) You see in this that it is a bond established by God's authority and institution—established by what He has appointed and required...
- When a marriage is torn apart by disobedience...
 - whether it be by cantankerous behaviour—by rotten words and such...
 - or by adultery and fornication...
 - the person is guilty of separating what God has joined together!
 - It is a violation of a covenant obligation before God who has made the husband and wife one...

TRANS> But now look...

2. Christ's relationship with His church also creates oneness or unity between Him and His church...
- a. Paul has already spoken about this several times in Ephesians...
- Back in Eph 2,
 - He made much about how, through Christ, the Gentiles are brought into one body with the Jews...
 - There are not two bodies with two plans...one for Jews and one for Gentiles...
 - there is only one people...
 - And now that Christ has come, that new people is made up of Jews and Gentiles.
 - There is only one body.
- b. In Ephesians 5:30,
- Paul says expressly that **“we are members of His body.”**
 - members of Christ's body.
 - In verse 32 he states that this is a mystery...
 - That means that it is something that is now revealed to us that was not understood before...
 - Now the Gentiles are one with the Jews because both are one with Christ...
- c. It is very important for you, as Christians, to understand this mystery that is revealed in Christ...
- Before Jesus came,
 - it was not understood that the Lord would actually become one with His people in the way that He become one with us in Christ.
 - The people of old were promised that He would be their God and that He would forgive their sins...
 - They were promised that somehow He would take away their sins, but they did not yet understand how He would do this...

- They did not understand that the Son of God Himself would actually come from heaven and take to Himself human flesh—
 - And then be covenantally joined to us in such an intimacy that we would be one with Him...
 - *One*, so that our sins would be His sins and His righteousness would be our righteousness—
 - as if we were one organism...
 - *One*, so that in and by His death on the cross, we all died to sin;
 - and that by His resurrection, we are all given new life...
 - so that as soon as we are joined to Him by faith,
 - we obtain new life in Him—as one with Him...
 - His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

TRANS> You see how our lives are wonderfully bound up—tied together with Christ—by God’s institution—by the relationship that He established between us and Christ...

- We need to realise that what God ties together by covenant is truly tied together.
 - It is one because God, by His institution, has made it one.
 - This covenantal unity and oneness is common to both marriage and to the relationship of Christ and His church.
- Now let’s look at the second important feature that makes our relationship to Christ like the relationship of a husband to a wife...
 - and that would be that...

B. Both relationships are a unity involving headship and subdination... where there is a member who is head of the body.

1. In this we may think of the Trinity where you have one God in three persons...
 - and clearly the Father is head...
 - This is expressly stated in 1 Cor 11:3, where it says that the head of Christ is God...
 - It is evident all through the scriptures that this is so—
 - for example, it is the Son who always obeys the Father and not the other way around...
 - and it is the Father who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit, but the Son and the Holy Spirit do not send the Father.
 - The Trinity is a relationship of perfect unity and concord in which each delights in His place and joyfully serves the other.

TRANS> Now it should come as no surprise if God should pattern His creation after Himself...

- after all, we are made in His image...
 - And so it is not surprising to find that...
- 2. In marriage, God appointed one party to be head over the other...
 - a. That one spouse is called to submit to the other who is to lead in love.

- Marriage, as He designed it, is meant to be a reflection (an image or picture) of the relationship of God the Father with the other members of the Trinity...
 - It is supposed to be as beautiful and harmonious as the Trinity!
 - The wife's submission is not demeaning...
 - It is analogous to the submission of the Son of God who is fully equal with the Father, yet subject to Him as head.
- b. In fact, the very beauty of the marriage relationship is to be found in the two living in their distinctions of authority and function...
 - It is stated in very clear language in verse 23 that the husband is the head of the wife.
 - That means that the husband is to represent his wife and to take responsibility for their life together as one.
 - He is to use his authority to do good to her as his body.
 - And the wife is to joyfully support him in his leadership, and to submit to him...
 - In this way, they are to be one—in a blending together as leader and follower...
 - They are not to act like a body with two heads, but a body with one head that functions harmoniously.
 - It should be realised as well that from the beginning,
 - God made the man and the woman to be suited to their respective roles—they are differently made to suit the roles God gave them.
 - He constituted the man to lead and the woman to respond...
 - When the man and his wife are blended together as He ordained,
 - there is a completeness and perfection that delight them both.

TRANS> But now let me tell you about a most marvellous headship of all...

3. Now that Christ has come and has made Himself one with His people—
 - a. He also has become the head of the body, just as the husband is head of the wife.
 - God has made Him head over all His covenant people—over the entire church of God...
 - You can see that this is also expressly stated in verse 23:
 - **Eph 5:23: “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church.”**

TRANS> How excellent it can be to have a head like Jesus Christ...

- b. It means so much to have Christ as our head!
 - 1) It means that He takes responsibility for us as a part of Him—
 - Paul says, “**and He is the Saviour of the body!**”
 - As our head,
 - He takes responsibility for whole ruined mass of us!
 - As head, He treats our sin as if it were His own... for we are now His body by covenant!
 - He stands before God for all of us, for we are one with Him.

- 2) And being who He is, He refuses to have a sinful body!
 - Therefore, when He became one with us,
 - He went to the cross, bearing our sins as His own—as the sins of His own body...as if He had committed them all Himself.
 - He took full responsibility for the wrongs that we had done because He became our head!
 - Neither will He have a rebellious body...
 - Therefore, He pours out His Spirit on us to change us so that we put off the old man and put on the new man that is renewed in His likeness (Him who is our head).
 - And He promises that when we see Him and are joined to Him in heaven, we will be like Him!
 - Furthermore, as our head, he instructs us, protects us...
 - as it says in verse 29, He nourishes us and cherishes us...
 - He provides that loving care of a nursing mother over her children...
 - looking after all our needs and jealously defending us from all harm so that everything becomes subservient to our salvation.
- 3) You see that having Christ as our head changes everything for us!
 - He is indeed the Saviour of the whole body...His own body by covenant.
 - Just think about it!
 - If He were not the head of the church, there would be no salvation for us at all...
 - That is why we refuse to acknowledge any other head of the church but Christ.

TRANS> Now the point is, that the headship and oneness in marriage is the very same sort of headship and oneness that we have in Christ.

- And if the headship and oneness in Christ is exercised in such a wonderful way, so ought the headship and oneness of marriage to be exercised in a wonderful way!
- The two relationships are perfectly suited to be laid up beside each other for comparison...

III. This structural similarity of man to wife with Christ to His church means that we can look at one relationship to learn of the other...

A. First, let's look at how marriage helps us to learn about the church's relationship with Christ, then we will look at how our relationship with Christ helps us to learn about marriage.

1. A married woman shows us how much her life is tied up with that of her husband.
 - a. Just to use a very simple illustration,
 - If he is a man who works hard and manages his wealth well,
 - If he is kind and judicious with his money, that brings great benefit to her.
 - If, on the other hand, he is a lazy man who drains away the family resources with his habits,
 - she suffers and struggles because she is one with him and because he is her head.

- b. To use another illustration...
 - If a woman has a husband who brings God's word into the home and who eagerly searches the scriptures to guide them in their worship...
 - and leads them to a sound church—and even chooses where to live based on the availability of a sound church,
 - it will bring great spiritual blessing to his whole household!
 - His wife will be greatly benefited by his headship.
- 2. The point is, that no matter what kind of husband she has,
 - she understands the effect of having a head...for good or for bad...
 - and this helps her to realise how marvellous it would be to have a head who gave himself for her to nourish and cherish her—
 - as Christ does the church.
 - Knowing, from marriage, the power and influence of a head,
 - we are able to understand how excellent it is to have Christ as our head.
 - From marriage, we understand by analogy what headship is like and it makes it more clear and meaningful to us to be told that Christ is our head.
 - As our head, He does all things for us!

TRANS> Now let's look at it the other way around...

- B. How that by looking at the church's relationship to Christ, we learn about marriage and what it ought to be.
 - That is primarily what Paul is doing in our text—
 - He is showing us what marriage ought to look like by showing us what Christ and His relationship with the church looks like!
 - He is saying,
 - “husbands, look at Christ to see what kind of head you ought to be!”
 - “wives, look at the church as subject to Christ to see what kind of wife you ought to be!”
 - 1. So husbands, what does Christ do for His bride as her head?
 - a. He loved her and gave Himself for her.
 - She was in need, so He sacrificed Himself to save her from her sins.
 - It didn't matter that it was her fault—He loved her and was committed to her so that He went all the way to the cross for her.
 - Truly, He regarded her sins as His own—as if He committed them.
 - He went before the Father and He said, “punish me for she did...”
 - And then He went through the whole ordeal of coming to dwell in this sinful world and of submitting to death, even the death of the cross—all the pain, all the anguish, all the shame.
 - This means that instead of treating your wife and her concerns and problems as unimportant and as separate from yours,
 - You are to treat them as your own concerns and problems and you are to sacrifice to help her.

- It means that if her parents are giving her a hard time about what she is doing with the kids, you step in and take the heat from them instead leaving it to her—you are her head.
 - It means that if the children are not listening to her, you step in and address the children about that...
 - I hate it when a husband boasts that the kids listen to him but not to his wife.
 - If you were the right kind of husband, it would be impossible for them to listen to you and not listen to your wife...
 - Because you would command them to listen to their mother as much as to you.
 - Do you get what I mean? Then, if they don't obey her, they aren't obeying you because you told them to listen to her.
- b. Looking at Christ, a husband can also see how Christ nourishes the church and sanctifies her as His own flesh.
- He gives her the Holy Spirit to work in her and to make her holy.
 - He corrects her and He works in her by feeding her with His Word to make her more and more what she is called to be.
 - Husbands, you are to take responsibility for your wife's spiritual growth.
 - You are to lead Bible study in your home, to initiate prayer for her, to talk to her about her doubts and fears in an effort to strengthen her faith.
 - You are to point it out when she is not doing the will of God—to hold her accountable and to help her grow.
 - Instead of tagging along to church with her, you are to take the initiative to see that your family goes to church—you are to lead the way because you are responsible.
 - So many Christian men are like little whipped boys in our day.
 - They need to grow up and take their place as head of their home.
2. And wives, look at how the church responds to Christ as your example.
- a. Paul says that she submits to Him—she respects Him and she obeys Him.
- He says, “wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord... just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”
 - And then in verse 33, he tells you to see that you respect your husband.
- b. Wife, without your submission, you spoil the beautiful unity that God intended for marriage.
- The true church does not go her own way—she does not buck against Christ—but she comes to live in harmony with Him...
 - She joins herself to His household and no longer does her own thing.
 - She is there to please Him, to do His will, to carry out His instructions.
 - That is what you are to do with your husband.
 - This does not destroy your identity, it is your identity!
 - As the bride of Christ, the glorious thing about us is that our identity is as one who belongs to Him.

- We find life not by holding on to our life as separate from Christ, but by denying ourselves and taking up our cross to follow Him.
 - We want to do this because we have come to see the beauty of Christ and of His way—we want to live with Him as our head.
- C. Now if you are tracking with what I am saying, I am sure that some of you are thinking... “but wait a minute, this is too idealistic...”
1. What if you have a husband that refuses to imitate Christ, or a wife who refuses to imitate the church?
 - So that a wife might say, “Of course I want to be one with Christ—but it is quite another thing to be one with my husband.”
 - And a husband will look at his wife and say, “How can I be one with her when she is so stubborn?”
 - a. But you must not let your spouse’s sins keep you from doing your part in the relationship to make it what it is supposed to be.
 - In 1 Peter 3, Peter instructs wives with disobedient husbands to still submit to their husbands in the Lord without agitation and unrest...
 - You are to calmly submit, doing your part in the relationship with trust in God even though he is not doing his part.
 - You do it for the Lord—because you are to be picture of the church’s relationship to Christ—at least on your part.
 - b. Let me even say that when your spouse is not doing what he or she is called to do in the relationship, there is a sense in which you have an even greater opportunity to honour the Lord.
 - When a wife submits to a cantankerous husband, it stands out even more than when a wife submits to a godly loving husband.
 - And when a husband lays down his life for a rebellious wife, and pursues her and continues to pour out his life for her,
 - he shows the world how Christ pursues us even though we are sinners—and he shows the world his own love for Christ.
 - The prophet Hosea did this with his rebellious wife.
 - c. So look at rebellion in your spouse not as that which keeps *you* from honouring Christ and being what He calls you to be,
 - but rather as an opportunity to serve the Lord sacrificially.
 - But perhaps you are struggling with another objection...
 2. Maybe in hearing this, you would say, “who is sufficient for these things?”
 - As a husband, you would say, “How can I possibly love my wife as Christ loves the church?”
 - And as a wife you would say, “How can I possibly submit to my husband as the church submits to Christ... I am not that strong.”
 - a. And of course it is true—we all come short of the glory of God in many ways.
 - The standard to which God calls us will never be met in this life...
 - But still, we are to reach for the high calling we have in Christ Jesus!
 - And we are to reach for it by His grace.

- b. Remember where I began reading today?
- Not with verse 22 where Paul starts to instruct wives and husbands about marriage... but I began in verse 15.
 - I wanted to include the part where Paul tells you not to be drunk with wine but to filled with God's Spirit.
 - I wanted to include where he explains what happens when you are filled with God's Spirit.
 - He does not say that you do strange things like falling on the floor or seeing visions...
 - In verses 19-21, Paul uses three participles to tell you what happens when you are filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - They can be boiled down to this...
 - v. 19: praising God to each other,
 - v. 20: thanking God in all things,
 - and v. 21: submitting to one another.
 - Did you hear the last one? **Submitting to one another in the fear of God.**
 - That is one of the things you do when you are filled with the Holy Spirit instead of being intoxicated with wine or whatever else you might be intoxicated with (anything from porn to shopping).
- c. What does this tell you?
- It tells you that when the Holy Spirit is at work in you, He enables you to submit to one another in the way that God wants—
 - The word *submit* means to line up under each other, each in your place.
 - Paul talks about three relationships that involve submission... marriage (for the rest of chapter 5), parenting, and work (in chapter 6).
 - And of course the relationship we have been looking at is marriage.
 - The Spirit of God is at work in you to help you in them all!
 - That is not just an encouraging fact, though it is that!
 - But let me tell you how the Spirit works to enable you to live in beautiful marriage.
 - Yes, He gives you grace in your heart so that you can obey—but He does not simply zap it into you.
 - He does it in a much better way than that.
 - He does it in the way that I have been talking about today.
 - The Spirit's job is to show Christ to you.
 - He shows you how beautiful the relationship of Christ with us as the church is—and how admirable He is as our head!
 - And the more you see this, the more you are drawn to pour out everything for Him—the more you are able to forget about yourself and start living for Him.
 - And with marriage, where it is a picture of that very relationship you have with Christ, this is especially the case.
 - The more the Spirit draws you into the love of Christ, the more delight you have in doing what marriage calls for.

3. The more we see how Christ treats His church, the more we come to understand how every husband ought to treat his bride...
 - And when we see the beautiful way the church responds to Him, we see how a woman ought to respond to her husband.
 - Husbands and wives, if you want to grow in your marriage, delight yourself in Christ and His church and He will help you, on your part, to reflect what is so beautifully found in that relationship.
 - His Spirit will transform you.
 - And all of you, whether you are married or not, know that you are married to Christ your head.
 - Delight in this relationship and you will find grace to prepare yourself for marriage or to live as Paul or the widow Dorcas did, for all the members of Christ's body.