

## **175 and Counting: Marriage, “It relates to Christ and the Church”**

**Ephesians 5:22-33**

By [Rev. Joshua M. Rieger](#)

If you would, turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 5:22-33. If you're using the pew Bible you'll find that on pages 978 and 979. This morning we're looking at a difficult passage, not because it's difficult to understand but because it's difficult to live. And we're looking at it — it's a rather long passage. I certainly won't be able to exhaust it this morning. About seven years ago we preached through Ephesians here and there were actually seven sermons devoted to this passage. I've gone back and listened to every one of them. I would encourage you to listen to them; they were a great encouragement to me as a husband. I would definitely encourage you to look at them and learn more from them.

But this morning we'll be primarily looking, as you can see in the title, at marriage as it relates to Christ and the Church. We're continuing a series, in light of our 175th anniversary next month, where we're looking at certain things that are facing our church today. And marriage is one of those things that is not just facing our church today but has always faced the church. It's always a struggle; it's a place where Satan always attacks. And so we're looking at marriage today and we'll look at it a couple of more times in the coming months at different elements. But before we go to the Word today and Ephesians 5, let's go to the Lord and ask for help in coming to His Word.

*Heavenly Father, we are so very blessed that You have given us Your Word, that You have given us marriage, that You have given us Your Spirit. And we know that we could not be the men and women that You desire in marriage without Your Spirit and Lord we certainly cannot understand and be transformed by Your Word apart from the working of Your Spirit in our lives. And so, Lord, as we come to Your Word, as we read it, as we hear it taught, we pray, Lord, that You would be working in us, be transforming us, giving us minds to hear and hearts to do that which You command, that You would give us hearts that love You more than anything else. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Please read with me in Ephesians 5 beginning in verse 22:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to 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. 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.

People have referred to atoms as the basic building block of matter; they refer to cells as a basic building block of life. It seems like everything has a basic building block. Well marriage is the basic building block of civilization and created order and relationship. And this passage tells us that marriage relates to Christ and the Church. Now there's a couple of contexts that I want to give us as we come to this passage. First of all is the context of the mystery of Christ. Ephesians is a book all about the mystery of the Gospel. The word, "mystery," appears over and over and over again in the book of Ephesians. It's something that is, maybe a buzz-word, by the time we get to chapter 5. When Paul says the word, "mystery," it already has a meaning in the minds of the readers, of the hearers of this book. In Ephesians 1 verses 8 through 10, Paul talks about mystery and he kind of defines it for you so that as you go forward you have an idea of what he's talking about. He says that Christ's redemption is mysterious. He defines the Gospel, the redemption, salvation, as mysterious. As he gets to chapter 3 and he goes through verses 1 through 11 of chapter 3, Paul talks about the fact that his ministry is to preach the mystery, especially to the Gentiles. And again it becomes very clear the mystery is the Gospel.

When we get to chapter 5 and you get to verse 32 and he mentions mystery, he says, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church," the hearers, reading this book for the first time already know exactly what "mystery" means. It's a word that has a meaning in their minds already. But in case there's any question, he clarifies that. He says it relates to "Christ and the church." He lets you know exactly what mystery he's talking about. Now as he's talking about a mystery he's not talking about something that we can't understand or about something that only a select few who have a special knowledge can understand. He's talking about something that was a mystery but has been revealed through God's Word, something that everyone who reads God's Word can know about Christ and about the Gospel. He's talking about a revealed mystery and yet something that we will never be able to plumb the

depths of. And so as he comes to Ephesians 5 where we've read this morning, we need to understand that Paul is very clearly writing about the Gospel and not just about marriage.

The second context is that of mutual submission. As you read through Ephesians you see that this passage actually needs to be set in the broader context of Ephesians. In the introduction, he tells us in just the first couple verses that his readers are two things — first of all, they are “in Christ,” and simultaneously they are “at Ephesus.” And so in the first three chapters he goes through and explains the Gospel. He explains that he is a minister of the Gospel to the Gentiles. He explains what it means to be “in Christ.” And then as chapter 4 begins, as he works through chapters 4 through 6, he begins working out the application of what it means to be in Christ at Ephesus or in Christ in relationship with others. He calls us, in the verse just prior to the passage we read this morning, in chapter 5 verse 21, to submit to one another. He calls us to mutual submission. He calls us to willingly submit; not in the sense that Christ's Gospel has in some sense erased the need for an authority structure, but in personal relationship in the community of the church we are supposed to submit to one another.

I had, after the first service, one of our ladies quote another lady from this church in one of the women's Bible studies recently where they were studying this and saying we are called or commanded, especially women in this passage, to do something, to live as an example before our world something, that our world just doesn't understand at all in submission. And it's not just women who are called in this passage, very specially, to do that in marriage, but each of us is called to mutually submit to one another. In fact, immediately after the command for mutual submission he shows us God's design for authority in the three most basic relationships in society. In the verses we read he shows us marriage and submission or authority and the home life. In relationship of parents and children he shows us the family life. And in vocation he shows us the working life through chapter 6 verse 9.

The third context, though, as we come to this passage, is the context of the Gospel in marriage. At creation God made Adam and Eve to be one flesh. He created Adam first and then Eve. 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that Adam was created as the image and glory of God and Eve was created as the glory of man. They were created with an equality of being to be one flesh. Even as they were two people with two distinct roles, they were called to be one flesh. At the fall, these roles were overturned. The serpent sought to confuse and undo these roles. And in Genesis 3:16 in the curse we see God's word to Eve where they show us that a part of the fall and the curse is that Eve will desire to be master over Adam. Eve's decision of the moment became the habit of a lifetime. In Christ, the fall is reversed. He obeyed where Adam failed. He is restoring what has fallen, and a Christian marriage is an example of this.

And so as we look at this passage this morning, there are three things that I want

us to look at. The first is, I want us to look at submission as unto the Lord. The second thing I want us to look at is Christ's love for the Church. And the third thing that I want us to look at is the profundity of marriage or the profundity of the message, as chapter 5 verse 32 tells us.

## **SUBMISSION AS UNTO THE LORD**

First of all let's look at submission as unto the Lord. Wives, this passage is an unpopular message. It's shocking in our politically correct culture. It's not a passage or a command that's hard to understand, but it is hard to live and sometimes it's even hard to like. Our culture tells us that this isn't even optional. It tells us that this is wrong. Our culture tells us that this passage commands women to give away their rights and their freedoms that are theirs. Our culture tells us that if you do this you'll fail to live up to your potential. And not only is the command to submit a difficult and unpopular command, but the command in verse 33 that the wife respect her husband is also an unpopular command.

You don't have to look very far on television and book and movie to see that this is an unpopular command. In fact, I would challenge you to find a popular movie or television show today that shows a husband that is not bumbling or blithering, who is actually respected in the home. This is an uncommon and unpopular message. However, we know that God does not command us to do that which is not for our own good. And in addition to that, in addition to our knowledge of God's good plans and good intentions and good commands for us in His Word, you don't have to look very far in our culture to see widespread marital breakdown and realize there must be some lie in their understanding and rejection of God's design. Why would our culture be the ones to whom we would look for advice on marriage where marriage isn't successful and marriage doesn't look anything like something good?

Since chapter 4, Paul has called us to live distinctly as Christians in the world. He's called us to be set apart. We're not to be absorbed or assimilated in the world's sinful patterns of relationships. The way that we relate to others is not supposed to be dysfunctional the way that the world is. This is no different today than it was in the first century. Twenty centuries may have passed but Paul is saying something that's very real to us today. As we look at the fact that Paul is saying, "The world's relationships are dysfunctional. Don't live that way. This is a place where you can be set apart, an image of God. We're to live as salt and light," he tells us. And as we come to this passage and he tells us to mutually submit to one another, he's telling us, "The way in which you relate to one another is radically different than the way the world relates to one another. All of you, as Christians, are called mutually to submit to one another."

And the command in chapter 5 verse 21 is to be obeyed by all Christians in community and fellowship, but as we come to chapter 5 verse 22 all the way

through chapter 6 verse 9, we see three contexts described of relationships where one party is called to submit but not the other. So while mutual submission is something that we're all supposed to practice, there's something unique in these three relationships where there is a unique submission that is called for. Paul tells us that the reason a Christian wife submits to her husband is because of his God-given role of leadership and authority in marriage. This passage tells us, "Just as Christ is head of the Church, so is a husband leader in the marriage." Just as we are called, all of us, each and every one of us as Christians, to submit to Christ, so this passage says wives should submit to their husbands. And yet we see in this passage that marriage is not a tool for a woman's subjugation. It's actually purposed for her true freedom in a healthy and loving relationship with her husband.

And another thing we need to notice about this is the Gospel or the Church's submission to Christ is not merely an example. It's not an example so that as Paul has been explaining the Gospel he has a sense, as we come to the end of chapter 3 — "They probably get the Gospel now. Now I'm going to start talking about marriage. Hey, I know they get the Gospel; I'll use it as an illustration." That's not what he's doing here. In actuality, he's telling us that you are living out a picture in marriage of the Gospel drama. Far from the Gospel being an illustration of marriage, marriage is actually an illustration of or a symbol of the Gospel in a world that needs it so very desperately.

## **CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH**

And this illustration continues to be carried out in Christ's love for the Church and the husband's responsibility in marriage. Illustrating the mystery of the Gospel is a privilege and also a challenge to Christian husbands and wives. Unless you think that the husbands get the easy end of the bargain on this command, let's look at the rest. There are three verses that are dedicated to the wife in this passage, and husbands, you get six! Paul speaks of the husband's authority but he doesn't tell him to lord it over his wife, in fact, the opposite. Paul speaks of the authority that a husband's supposed to have in love. It seems today to be assumed or at least kind of felt that Paul calls the wife to a little bit more difficult role here, but which of us as Christians would claim that the Church's role in the Gospel is more difficult than Christ's role in the Gospel? The husband here is called to emulate Christ and His self-sacrificial incarnation, and His self-sacrificial death. And if we allow ourselves to feel that the command for submission is actually in some way more difficult than the command for the type of love that the husband is called to here, then we're diminishing Paul's command to the husband, we're diminishing our understanding of the kind of love that Christ displayed to us in the Gospel, and in fact, we're skewing the entire Gospel. The model for how much and in which way a husband is supposed to love his wife is Jesus Christ.

In Ezekiel 16 and certainly in Hosea also, but particularly in Ezekiel 16, we see a picture of God's love for Israel. And that picture that we're given is a picture of marriage. In fact, God says that He covenanted with Israel. He says that He took the vows to Israel. This passage tells us that God made Israel His bride, he covenanted with her, he vowed to her, and in addition it tells us that He made her beautiful. He talks about the way that He made her beautiful, that He adorned her, that He made her very attractive. Really it ties you right back to what Paul says Christ did for the Church here. He says, starting in verse 25, that "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." Israel was beautiful because God blessed her. God bestowed splendor on her as a part of the marriage. He guarded her. And when we get to verse 15, we see exactly how Israel repaid that covenant and that kindness. Ezekiel 16:15 tells us that Israel "trusted in her own beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his."

In Ephesians though, Paul tells us that God has entered into a new covenant with His Church. He has forged a covenant with believing Jews and Gentiles to be His Son's bride. And we see here that the Gospel and the way in which God loved Israel and when Israel went off and was unfaithful He continued to be faithful to her and made a new covenant with her and is once again making His bride beautiful that He might present her in splendor. In this picture of the Gospel, we see a training manual for husbands. This is how we are to love our wives. We're supposed to love them self-sacrificially, more important than ourselves. We're not to count wrongs against them, place her needs above our own, her rights even above our own. Our world tells us that women, by submitting, are giving up their God-given rights, but in fact, men who love their wives in the way that the Bible calls them to are placing their wives rights above their own. She is to be more valuable to us than our own life. We are to be seeking her beauty, her purity, her holiness; this is to be the end to which we live our lives. This doesn't involve griping to friends about frustrations or horded desires. Our passion is to see her godly desires fulfilled. But again, this verse doesn't simply say, "See the Gospel that I've been using, that I've been telling you about? It's a pretty good illustration of what I'm telling husbands to do." In fact, it's the opposite. It points to the profundity of marriage because marriage is a picture, a God-created picture, of how His Son laid His life down for His Church. It's a picture of how God's Church will submit to God's Son. And so we see how profound this message is. It's about Christ and the Church.

Seven years ago when Dr. Duncan was preaching through this passage he said, "A Gospel marriage is a powerful message in a culture where we see relationship, at every level, disintegrating at an astonishing rate." Paul spends time focusing on this issue because in every age, at creation, when the serpent came to the Garden, in Paul's day, and in our day, Satan has attacked marriage.

Satan is always attacking marriage. And maybe you've seen a History Channel documentary or read a book or seen a movie about, you know, some of the code breakers in World War II and the way that they labored, effort without end, to break the code of the enemy so that they would know what was truly important to the enemy so that they could drive at the heart of what was important rather than just simply responding to various occurrences here and there. Or maybe you've heard the quote, "Don't just treat the symptoms; cure the disease." The same kind of idea — getting at the heart of things.

## **THE PROFUNDITY OF MARRIAGE**

Well, Satan knows that marriage is at the heart of what creation is all about. Marriage is a picture of the Gospel. He knows that marriage is important and so if he's wise, he's going to attack it, just like he attacks the Gospel. Marriage, in Genesis, at creation, is the culmination of God's gift to men. This was a relationship that made God's creation "very good." He made Adam and He looked around and He didn't see Eve and He said that there was something wrong and so He created this relationship and now creation is "very good." Satan hates this. He does all that he can to destroy it. At the fall, Eve is no longer submissive to Adam and Adam is no longer willing to lay down his life to defend Eve, to protect her. In Genesis 3, we see two people playing a blame-game, pointing fingers at one another, while Satan sits on the sidelines watching exactly what he intended. Marriage is, and always has been, under attack.

Paul commands love and respect. And as we look at marriage, the purpose of marriage, the Gospel, should affect every single one of us. As we look at a Christian marriage and see the Gospel lived out in front of us, it should affect every believer. As Christians, we should live lives that are shaped by and focused on what the focus of Christian marriage is. Living out Biblical marriage may be politically incorrect, but it's worth every single pain and it's worth every single effort. Our culture tells us that we're to fight for individual rights over community but the Scriptures tell us that we're supposed to lay down our lives for one another, that we're supposed to treat one another as if they're more important than we are. And these are the truths that should be true in Biblical marriage. We need to live as God has called us in our own marriages. This is the message of the Gospel.

In a Biblical marriage the home should be a safe, welcoming, and trusting place. It shouldn't be a place where a husband or a wife are scared to share their deepest fears and anxieties and frustrations and inabilities. It should be a place that's warm and welcoming and encouraging, a place where we're encouraged to trust more in Christ and trust less in ourselves, to love one another more than we love ourselves. There shouldn't be bitterness and discrimination. We, men and women both, should live in relationship with our friends, outside of our marriage, in a way that builds up their marriage and builds up ours. We shouldn't

encourage complaining or bitterness or anything like that, but should rather be encouraging love, encouraging respect. We shouldn't be gossiping about disappointments but rather building up our spouse as we live in relationships.

In fact, this is an application that is not just for those of you that are married. Those of you who aren't married who are in friendships with people who are married, encourage your friends in their marriages. Don't encourage them to bitterness. We can't be embarrassed by the Bible's commands in and designs for marriage. We live in a time, just as always, we live in a time when marriage is under attack. And we'll always live in a time when marriage is under attack. So whether it's who should be married — a husband and a wife — or whether it's the ideas of respect and submission or the ideas of treating somebody else as more important than you are even when you're hurt, these things are unpopular. Our culture is never going to like them. Our culture at large is never going to encourage you in these areas. And quite honestly, the Church, and each of us individually at times, when we hear these things challenged, rather than responding with boldness defending this picture of the Gospel often are a little embarrassed. We respond with embarrassment rather than boldness. We respond with embarrassment about Christ and His relationship with His Church.

Those who are looking for or approaching marriage. There are questions that you need to ask. Women, you need to ask yourselves as you approach marriage, as you meet men, "Am I prepared for this man to be my head? Would it be for the long-term blessing and advance of Christ's kingdom for me to submit to him?" Men, you need to ask, "Do I love this woman with a desire to see her sanctified and blessed? Would I do anything to care for and protect her? Am I desiring to see her sanctified and holy or is she the fulfillment of my life?"

Most of all though, as we look at marriage, we have to submit to Christ and to honor Him. This is what Paul is telling us in verse 32. In verse 32 when he says, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church," we need to know that marriage is important because we have to honor Christ. Our purpose is to glorify Christ and to enjoy Him, so marriage is incredibly important. The purpose of marriage is to glorify Christ and glorify His relationship to the Church; it's to glorify Christ laying down His life for His bride. It's to glorify Christ in seeing a picture of the Church which submits to its King. It's to point us to Him and it's to point us to our relationship to Him. And so whether marriage is honored among us should be important to every single one of us. It should affect our families; it should affect the way that our children see the Gospel lived out. It should be an evangelistic tool in our society, in our workplace, as we live a marriage that is Biblical. We must value marriage because marriage was created by God to be a picture of His Gospel and when we minimize the commands and the structure and the way in which we are called to live in marriage we minimize the Gospel, so this is incredibly important to us. I want to encourage each of you to look at this passage and ask yourself, "Do I love marriage and do I tie it to the Gospel? When I see marriages around me, am I thinking about the Gospel? Do I

want to see marriage honored because I want to see Christ honored?" These are the questions we have to ask ourselves. Let's close in prayer.

*Heavenly Father, once again this is not a passage that is difficult to comprehend, but it is a passage that is very difficult to live. It is only in Christ that we can lay down our lives and seek others' needs above our own. It is only in Christ that we can live in marriage the way in which You have called us to live. Lord, I pray that we would listen to Your Word, that we would be transformed by Your Word. Lord, I pray that we would learn, as a congregation, as families, to love You more, to love You more in marriage, to love You more as we see other marriages. I pray, Lord, that You would protect and guard the marriages in this church by teaching us to love You more. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Please sing in response with me, hymn number 719, "A Christian Home."

Before I pronounce the benediction, remember there is a congregational response after the benediction in the bulletin.

Now hear the Lord's blessing. Peace be to you, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with you all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, with love incorruptible. Amen.

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