

Ephesians 5:22-33

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[0 : 00] I'm going to preach to you on marriage for the next two weeks. And I realise that for many in this congregation here this morning, that might be hard, isn't it?

There are some who are married and it is deeply unsatisfying. There are some here who would love to be married, but it's just never worked out. And there are some here who were married and it was an absolute nightmare.

And so I'm well aware that this is not an easy topic for many of you. And yet I'm not going to apologise for that. Because I think the glorious truth of the real basis of marriage is a great comfort. And I hope that as we look at this picture of the relationship between Christ and his church, you will see how gloriously you are loved by God the Father, by the Lord Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

And I think also, I think it's right to say it, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, you are married. And we await, don't we, that great consummation.

[1 : 11] We are part of the bride of Christ. And so, that is my introduction. Now what makes marriage work? What makes marriage last? What makes marriage strong and deeply satisfying?

You know, it is a wedding, two people stand at the top of the aisle, they make promises to each other, because to a very large degree their relationship works. Otherwise they wouldn't be getting married. They like each other, they're attracted to each other, they have the same values, they have some of the same hobbies, some of the interests that they've shared in their courtship and engagement, and it's obvious to them and to others that they care about each other.

But all couples stand at the top of the aisle like that. And yet somewhere down the line, for so many, the marriages come unstuck. And the fact is that today marriage seems harder than it's ever been. And marriage as a lifelong commitment, one man to one woman, is not popular. Weddings are very popular, aren't they? Go to the Newsagent tomorrow, look at the bridal magazines, and they'll tell you weddings are popular.

We know that, don't we? Everything that happens on the day. The flowers are beautiful, the cars are fantastic, the bridesmaids look magnificent, the food and the wine and the dancing. How could you not like weddings?

[2 : 27] But marriage as a lifelong commitment to the same person, through thick and thin, through up and down, is not popular. How do you do that? How do we make sure that the marriages in this congregation last?

Well, we look at Ephesians chapter 5. And this is the answer. What will make a marriage work? What will make a human marriage work is when it copies another marriage.

Human marriage works when it copies the divine marriage. The marriage between Christ and his church. Human marriage works when it copies the divine marriage between Christ and the church. Now, at many levels, that just seems such a bizarre answer, isn't it? It's not Cosmo's answer of great sex or new woman's answer of unending romance. What makes marriage work is a couple seeing that their marriage is not the true marriage.

It's not the ultimate marriage. That we need to copy and imitate. That we need to base ourselves on another marriage. So we go through married life needing to have our eyes on someone else.

[3 : 37] And that other marriage is the pattern for our marriage. That is the primary marriage that we have to imitate and copy. And so we're going to take two weeks to pause and simply try and think a little bit more deeply about marriage.

Today the pattern. And then next week we try and get a bit more practical. And look at the nitty gritty of what that looks like. What it looks like to live this example of the divine marriage out.

So we understand the pattern this week. And we're going to see that marriage works when it copies the divine marriage between Christ and the church. When the husband and the wife play different

roles.

For the wife the part of submission and respect. And for the husband the part of headship and love. So let me give you that. Marriage works when it copies the divine marriage of Christ and the church. And when the husband and wife play different roles. The wife submission and respect. The husband, headship and love. Now let me give you two questions that probably are in your mind.

[4 : 35] Two questions about submission and headship. Let's put the brakes on here. First of all what is the relevance of all this? And then what is the problem with it? What is the relevance?

What about me? I'm single. I'm not yet married. What is the relevance? Well I think it's got particular relevance for us. Particularly if we're women. When the Bible talks about submission.

Biblical submission is not absolute and it's not universal. It is not all women to all men. It's not that. But it is one woman to one man.

It is a wife to a husband. If you are a woman and you are single. Therefore this passage is not telling you. That you have to submit to every man you meet. Submission is wife to husband.

Not woman to man generally. But whether you're a single man or a single woman. I think this passage is very relevant. One day because maybe one day you will be married. But even if that's not the case.

[5 : 33] You are friends. You are our brothers and sisters. Of those of us who are married. And you are an enormous help and encouragement to us. So the other way I think this question.

This passage raises the relevance question. Is to ask. Well it just seems so old fashioned isn't it? Well wives submitting husbands being hired.

How in any way is that relevant today? Just try throwing that out tomorrow morning. Over coffee time. At work. And I imagine that the feelings here this morning. Range from simple curiosity.

Curiosity. That seems so antiquated. And probably further along the spectrum. There are areas maybe of the faith which you are embarrassed. And this area of headship and submission.

You are a bit embarrassed about. And then there's probably some here. Who are angry. And they are frustrated. That the Bible could actually stipulate. Something so hurtful.

[6 : 30] Or something so demeaning to women. Now some people think. That this issue of women and headship. Is parallel to slavery. In the ancient world. So the Bible just seems to assume.

That slavery exists. And it tells slaves to work in a certain kind of way. Slavery existed in the ancient world. But we don't practice it today. And so some people say. Headship and submission are the same.

It's the same as that. Well actually there's quite a big difference. In that the Bible. Gives instructions to you. On how to be Christian.

If you are a slave. But the Bible never gives. Christian reasons for the institution of slavery itself. It never does that. If it exists.

It says. And you are a Christian. Here's what you do with it. But the Bible never says. God instituted slavery. Or caused it. Never. But with headship and submission.

[7 : 27] Husbands and wives. The Bible very clearly gives you Christian reasons. For headship and submission. And the reasons here in chapter 5. Are that the marriage relationship. Mirrors the relationship between God.

And his people. And that is why. Headship is for the husband. And submission for the wife. So if you know that. You're on that range. Of approaching the test.

Some with curiosity. Some with embarrassment. Some with anger. Let me ask you to suspend judgment. Let me ask you to suspend judgment.

For this morning. And for next Sunday morning. And let's try and work through this together. And hopefully we'll see it in a new light. Now the other question. I expect less of us have it. But it may be.

That some of us have it. It's the opposite end of the spectrum. It's not what is the relevance of all this. But what is the problem in it. What is the problem. In other words. The Bible tells wives to submit.

[8 : 23] So what's the problem. What's so difficult about it. Why are people finding it so unacceptable today. Now I think that kind of attitude. It's got the right view of the Bible.

It says the Bible is authoritative. It says we have to sit under the Bible. Even when we find this teaching difficult. But that view is a very shallow view of people. For people who read the Bible.

If you read the Bible. I think we have to approach this passage this morning. In the knowledge that for a wife. Who says this is God's word.

And I am going to submit to it. And to my husband. I think we have to be aware. That for some. Maybe for many this morning. That obedience will go hand in hand with tears. And deep personal suffering.

And we have to come to this passage. Knowing that all our marriages are flawed. My wife isn't here this morning. But our marriages are flawed.

[9 : 22] And they are shot through with sin. And we've got to say that. Don't we? Because we all look at each other's marriages. And we all think. Oh they seem so great. Don't they? And we envy.

Well you wouldn't if you lived with them. When we're told to submit. Or to be considerate. Or when we're told to love. And lay down our life. It's not something that we just need to nod our heads at. As if it's automatic. And as if it's obvious. And if it's easy. It is actually something that we need to bend our knees this morning for. And cry out to God for help. So these two questions.

What is the relevance of this in the 21st century? What is the relevance? I suppose that that is. Isn't it the 21st century woman's question? And then second question.

What is the problem with it? Well that is the kind of churchy evangelical man's question. Isn't it? Isn't it? Now. I want you to notice one thing.

[10 : 31] I'll say in introduction. I want you to notice this. Just before we get into it. That the command is never given to the man. To make sure the wife submits. The command is never given to the man.

To make sure the wife submits. The command you notice is always given to the wife. It is her will that is appealed to. It is never, never, never a club to put into the hands of men.

It is words spoken to the wife. So there's just two things. That I want to look at tonight. I want to look at the pattern. This morning I want to look at the pattern. And then I want to look at the roles. So first of all.

Let's look at the pattern. Between Christ and the church. What does all this talk mean? A divine marriage between Christ and the church. You can see it if you look 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. This mystery is profound. And I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Paul's point is this.

[11 : 31] Jesus is married to his people. Just like a husband is married to his wife. And the way that you see this through the passage. Is the constant word of the use. Use of the little word.

As. Or just as. Or also in the same way. Look at verse 32. Wives submit to your husbands. As to the Lord. The husband is the head of the wife.

As Christ is the head of the church. Verse 24. Now as. So also. Verse 25. Husbands love your wife. As. Christ loved the church. And gave himself up for her. Just as. Also. As. Copy. Copy. Copy. Copy. Copy an original marriage.

Paul is saying. When Jesus Christ went to the cross to die. What he was doing was giving his life for men and women and boys and girls like you and me. Who've turned their backs on God.

[12 : 30] And have brought chaos into the world and into our lives. That is how Christ loved us. He fell down. He laid down. His life to rescue us. And the Bible says that that love of Christ.

For his people is so strong. It's so passionate. It's so committed. That only the word marriage. Can be used to describe it. The love that is so strong. That Christ is actually a bridegroom.

And these men and women. Who he loves. Are actually like a bride. That is the divine marriage.

The divine marriage between Christ and the church. It's why. The book of Revelation.

An angel says to John. Come. I will show you the bride. The wife of the lamb. And I think of all Paul's language in chapter 5. As we read it.

It is based on another passage. It's based on a lovely passage. In Ezekiel chapter 16. So can you turn that. Ezekiel chapter 16. You all know it from your house group studies.

[13 : 28] So turn to page 702. Ezekiel chapter 16. And I'm going to read. I'm going to read quite a chunk of it. Just listen to the beauty. Of God's love for his people.

Ezekiel chapter 16. Again the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man. Make known to Jerusalem her abominations. And say. Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem. Your origin and your birth.

Are of the land of the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite. And your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth. On the day you were born. Your cord was not cut. Nor were you washed with water.

To cleanse you. Do you notice the language. Of Ephesians 5. Nor rubbed with salt. Nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No I pitied you. To do any of these things to you. Out of compassion for you. But you were cast out on the open field.

For you were abhorred. On the day that you were born. And then here we go. And when I passed by you. And saw you wallowing in your blood. I said to you in your blood. Live.

[14:26] I said to you in your blood. Live. And made you flourish like a plant in the field. And you grew up. And became tall. And arrived at full adornment. And your breasts were formed. And your hair had grown.

And yet you were naked and bare. And I passed by you again. And I saw you. Behold you at the age of love. And I spread the corner of my garment over you.

And covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you. And entered into a covenant with you.

Declares the Lord God. And you became mine. Then I bathed you with water. And I washed up your blood from you.

And anointed you with oil. And I clothed you also with embroidered cloth. And shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen. And covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments. And put bracelets on your wrists. And a chain on your neck. And put a ring on your nose. And earrings in your ears. And a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver.

[15:19] And your clothing was of fine linen. And silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour. And honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful. And advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations.

Because of your beauty. For it was perfect through the splendour. That I had bestowed on you. Declares the Lord God. Isn't that a stunning picture? Of God's love for his people. Like a father rescuing his child.

Like a lover making beautiful his bride. And clothing her. Dressing her. Washing her. Adoring her. That says Paul. Is what Jesus has done for you and I.

He found us. He brought us to him. He's made an eternal. Unbreakable covenant. Which is marriage. So what that means. Is that our marriages.

Are partly like a play. And the man plays the part of Christ. That covenant. Keeping. Searching. God.

[16:15] That we read of in Ezekiel. And the woman plays the part of the church. And what if you like happens. When a couple stand. And get married at the front of church. The curtains.

Come up. And the play begins. And the bridegroom. Plays the part of Christ. To his wife. Every single day. For the rest of their married life. And the wife now plays the part of the church.

To her husband. Every day of their married life. And written above the stage. Of their marriage. Begins this play. It says. Based on a true story. Based on an original.

That our marriages. Are based on the divine marriage. Between Christ and his bride. And the big point. Of this original marriage. The big point. Is oneness. Oneness.

Union. Of Christ. And all his people. So that nothing. Absolutely nothing. Separates. Us from Christ. Christ. It's all to do with the head. And the body image.

[17:12] Go back to Ephesians 5. Verse 23. For the husband. Is the head of the wife. Even as Christ. Is the head of the church. And his body. And is himself. Its saviour. Head and body.

Are never separated. They belong together. Look at verse 29. For no one ever hated his own flesh. But nourishes and cherishes it. Just as Christ does the church. And then verse 32.

This mystery is profound. But I am saying. That it refers to Christ. And the church. It's a profound mystery. It's a profound mystery. This morning. That Christ.

Is as close to his people. And he is united with them. He is as close. To his people. And he is united with them. As a husband and a wife.

Are to each other. In one flesh. Sexual union. You can't get any closer than that. You can't get any closer than that.

[18:08] That is how close Christ is to you and I. And it can only be described. This mysterious concept. Is it? But there should be never any doubt.

For you if you are a believer. How close you are to him. If you belong to him. And of course this fits. Doesn't it? So much. And so well with what God is doing.

What is God doing in the world? He is bringing everything together. Under the lordship of Christ. He is united. Jew and Gentile. Together. Christ is the head of a new humanity.

The church. And Christ is bound to that church. These men and women. In covenantal love. And in unbreakable closeness. Oneness. Oneness together.

That is the goal of everything that God is doing. It is where the world is heading. And I think that is profoundly helpful. To my marriage and to your marriage.

[19 : 05] That you may be. The marriage you may be in one day. That very very simply. The goal of my marriage.

Is not my marriage. Have you got that? And the goal of my marriage is not my marriage. The goal of my marriage is not my happiness. The point of my own marriage is what?

It is to display the ultimate marriage. And make it visible. And so I am to love Claire. In such a way. That it shows the world.

Just how much Christ loves the people. That is the challenge. And the reason why we are so often unhappy in our marriage. Is we have idolised them. And we have expected too much from them. We think our love story is the original. Our love story is the true story. The big story. It is the ultimate story. And many many people think their marriage is like that.

[20 : 03] The bride walks up the aisle. And the husband is already at the front. And there they are. They stand kind of next to each other. Holding each other's hands. Looking at each other. That isn't actually the way I think we should do vows.

I think we should be tuned. Probably tuned to face the congregation. So you are feasting each other. But you are reflecting out. You are reflecting what Christ has done.

You depend on each other for everything. You look at each other. But you face outwards. You face God together. And then you reflect that.

You reflect that to the world. You show other people in your marriage. What God's marriage is like. That is the purpose. I think there is another reason that this helps.

And it is a profound reason. And it is God has found a way. Of taking me. And uniting me to Christ. And removing all the barriers.

[21 : 07] Between me and Christ. And he has brought my wife to Christ. And united her to Christ. Well then. If we are one. If you can get this. If there is a oneness. Between husband and wife.

Who am I. To allow the destruction of that oneness. If Christ has bound me. As closely to him. As is possible. What would ever make me think.

That as a husband. I can allow all sorts of petty resentments. And silly pride. And silly sin. And annoyances. And irritations. Whatever it is. To come between my wife and I.

Do you see. The goal of Christ's marriage. Is oneness. The point of my marriage. Is to be oneness. Our marriage is to reflect that.

So marriage works. When a husband and wife. If I can follow that. Know their lines. And play their part. So what are they. Let's look at the roles. Let's look at the roles. Secondly.

[22 : 07] Well first of all. Wives submission in respect. Verse 32. Here is the command. Verse 32. So verse.

Trying to wives. Submit to your own husbands. As to the Lord. And then verse 23. For the husband is the head of the wife. Even as Christ is the head of the church's body.

And is himself its saviour. Now these are some of the most. Comprovisional words. Aren't they? The passage. And we struggle with it.

Wives submit to your husbands. Because the husband is the head of the wife. Now all we're going to do this week. Is notice the pattern. Next week I want to try and explain it. More of what it means to live by the pattern. But at least initially.

I want to make the problem worse. Right. And I think the pattern of wives. Submission to their husbands. We have to understand. It's not reciprocal. Husbands.

[23 : 03] Do not submit to their wives. And that is worth saying. Because if you look at verse 21. Verse 21 has misled a lot of people. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul. What is very popular if you read the commonities. Will say this. Paul is saying. Everybody in the church should submit to everyone. And he goes on to mention wives. But he's already said in verse 21.

We should assume that husbands are to submit to their wives. Because they submit to one another in everything. The problem with that phrase is it doesn't always mean. That it's reciprocal.

The one another there. It doesn't. So in Revelation chapter 6 verse 4. We're told that men slay one another. It can't mean that both people.

Both people at the same time slaughter one another. That can't mean that. Well listen to James. James chapter 5 and verse 6. James chapter 5 and verse 6.

[23 : 58] It's a famous verse. Verse 16. It says this. Therefore confess your sins to one another. And pray for one another. That you may be healed. And when you look at the context in James 5.

It is very clear that not everyone is confessing. Because not everyone is sick. It's only the person who is sick through sin. So the praying for one another. Is not because everyone needs to be healed. But because some do so.

So the context besides the meaning. When Paul says submit to one another. Then immediately he says. Doesn't he. Wives submit to your husbands.

And then he says children submit to your parents. And then he says slaves submit to your masters. And I think that means. Everyone should submit to the person they are submitting to.

Notice the pattern in Ephesians 5 and 6. Each time the person is told to submit. Then immediately the person they are told to submit to.

[24 : 57] Is told to do something in turn. Each time in Ephesians. Somebody is told to submit. Wives, children, slaves. And then the person they are told to submit to. Is told to do something in turn.

Husbands we are told. To love our wives. Fathers are told not to exasperate your children. Not to submit to them. Masters are told to treat their slaves well.

Not to submit to them. So we have got a big issue haven't we. What does the language of submission look like. Well as I said. All I want to do this morning. Is see this pattern. Submission is the pattern for the wife.

Because she is playing the part of the church. In the great marriage play. Which is based on the true story. Let's move on. We will come back to that next week. Husbands. Headship and love.

Now here again. I want to make a very very simple point. And I want you to notice this. This is the most important thing about the sermon. So wake up. Husbands are not commanded here to be the head.

[25 : 59] I don't know why I've missed this. I don't know why I've missed it for so many years. Husbands are not commanded to be the head. Do you notice that? Paul doesn't say husbands they ought to be the head. It says they are the head.

And Paul is telling us what the marriage relationship between a husband and wife is. Marriage is defined in part as the headship of a husband over a wife.

Without headship there is no marriage. I was speaking at a wedding. And on the way out of the service. Somebody was very very upset by this passage.

And they said to me it reflects a bygone era. It's an outmoded cultural form. The person says. He said to me. He and his wife. This is not a command that he felt was needed for today.

It was not a command that he had to keep today. Well I wish I'd said to them. Of course the problem is. It's not a command. Paul does not say to the husbands.

[26 : 56] He does not say to you if you are a husband. Be the head. He says you are. And if you are married. And you are the man. You are the head. Just as we would say if you are married.

You're a man. You are male. Now let me try and explain to you what it means. And then let me try and give you an illustration. Here's what it means. If you are married.

If you are a married man. You are inescapably in a position of leadership. Inescapably. You are inescapably in a position of leadership. You cannot successfully refuse to lead your home.

You always, always, always will lead. You will either lead it well. Or you will lead it poorly. But you will always lead it. So here is the words of one writer. Listen to this.

A husband cannot successfully refuse to lead. If he attempts to abdicate in some way. He may through his rebellion lead poorly.

[27 : 52] But no matter what he does. Or where he goes. He does so as the head of his wife. That is how God designed marriage. God has created us male and female. In such a way as to ensure that men will always be dominant in marriage.

If the husband is godly. Then the dominance will not be harsh. In fact his dominance will be characterized by the same self-sacrificial love demonstrated by our Lord at the cross.

But if a husband tries to run away from his abdication. And here is the key point. That abdication will dominate the home. If he catches a plane to the other side of the country.

And stays there. He will dominate in and by his absence. How many children have grown up in a home dominated by the empty chair at the table? If the marriage is one in which the wife.

And he uses the phrase wears the trousers. The wimpiness of the husband is the most obvious thing about the marriage. His abdication dominates. Now I realize that that might be controversial to think of it in that way.

[28 : 53] But I don't think it should be. It's just the position that reflects what Paul says here. That the husband is the head of the wife. In the same non-negotiable way that Christ is the head of the church.

And so the question for a husband is what we're going to kind of marinate in next week. The question for a husband is what kind of head are you going to be? Let me give you an illustration which has really helped me.

And I think it's a profoundly beautiful thing for a wife. And for a marriage. This idea of headship. One writer says. When a couple comes for marriage preparation. My operating assumption.

Is that always the man. Is completely responsible for all the problems. Amen. Now you hear some of you say. Let me read that again.

When a couple comes for marriage preparation. My operating assumption. Is that always the man. Is completely responsible for all the problems. Some may be inclined to react to this.

[29 : 55] But it is important to note. That responsibility. Is not the same as guilt. If a woman has been unfaithful. To her husband. Of course. She bears the guilt. Of adultery. But at the same time.

He is responsible for it. To illustrate. Suppose a young sailor. Disobeys his orders. And runs a ship aground. In the middle of the night. The captain was asleep.

And had nothing to do. With his irresponsible actions. But who is finally responsible? The captain is responsible. For the incident. It may strike many as being unfair. But that is undisputably.

The way God made the world. The sailor is guilty. The captain is responsible. The same writer goes on to say. Without his understanding of responsibility. Authority becomes meaningless. And tyrannical.

Husbands are responsible. For their wives. They are the head of their wives. As Christ is the head of the church. Taking a covenant oath. To become a husband. Assumes responsibility.

[30 : 50] For that home. This means that men. Whether through tyranny. Or abdication. Are responsible. For any problems. In the home. Now really.

What I want to do next week. So I want to show you. Why headship. In a marriage. Really means. Covenantal protection. For a wife. Headship does not mean.

It never means. That it is a husband's role. To tell his wife. What to do. Or what to think. Or what to go. Where to go. Or what to wear. Anything like that.

It is exactly the opposite. We are going to see next week. That headship bears a cross. And a husband's headship. Bears a cross. And a husband's love. Bestows loveliness.

And a wife's submission. Gives honour. And a wife's respect. Bestows dignity. Headship wears a cross. Love bestows loveliness.

[31 : 48] Submission bears honour. Respect. Bestows dignity. Christian marriages. Are meant to be a world. Of health. And wholeness. And human flourishing. As a husband says to his wife.

Who I am. And what I am about. Is you. What I am is for you. All that I have. I give to you. Completely. And utterly.

At your disposal. So a marriage works. When it copies. The divine marriage. Between Christ and the church. It works. When a husband and wife. Play different roles. For the wife's submission. Respect. And the husband.

Headship and love. And so next week. What I want to try and do. Is say. What are the actual lines. That we live. We speak in this play. What do the roles sound like. What do they look like.

What do they feel like. And my prayer is this. That God will help us. Not simply to do the acting. Out of the roles. But to understand. The foundations. And the pattern.

[32 : 46] And perhaps. More than anything. To realise. Just how close. We are to Christ. That we are unbreakably. Bound to him. As one.

Forever. Because of his love. And that applies. Doesn't it. Whether you're married. Whether you're divorced. Whether you've never been married. Or you never will be married.

But you are in Christ. Let's pray.