

Sermon 21: Embracing God's Design for Marriage: Ephesians 5:22-33

Text: Ephesians 5:22-33 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband..."

Introduction: Christianity's impact on marriage in the Greco-Roman World

- **Marriage in the first century:**

- Marriage was not viewed as a romantic or sacred bond.
- It was seen as a civil or economic contract.
- It was used to consolidate property, forge political alliances, and produce legitimate male heirs.
- They were arranged by fathers who held nearly absolute authority over their daughters.
- The will of a daughter, even as young as twelve, was not regarded as a valid barrier to an arranged marriage to establish desired family alliances.

- **Double-standards for men and women:**

- Unmarried men and women were not held to the same standard of moral expectations.
- Young men were extremely promiscuous and rarely held accountable for their indiscretions.
- Young women, on the other hand, were expected to be morally chaste.
- Unfaithfulness of husbands to their wife was morally and socially acceptable except for adultery with another free-citizen's wife.
- Adultery in these cases was viewed as a property rights issue, rather than a scandalous moral indiscretion.
- Wives, on the other hand, were treated harshly if they were to commit the same offense as their husbands.

- **Divorce was completely acceptable for shockingly pragmatic reasons:**
 - The 1st century Roman satirist Juvenal famously mocked this trend, writing of a woman who had "eight husbands in five autumns,"
- **The spread of Christianity completely revolutionized the way people viewed marriage.**
 - Men and women have equal value as image bearers.
 - Marriage is a sacred covenant between one man and one woman before God for life.
 - It should be by consent and with a passionate and wholehearted giving of oneself for the other.
 - Men and women are held to the same standards for moral chastity and giving of themselves in marriage.
- **Shifting Trends:**
 - Ancient trends did not change immediately, but as genuine Christianity took root in the Roman world, so did a radically different view of marriage.
 - This shift became even more pronounced during the Reformation.
 - The best of what the Western world has to offer regarding marriage can be followed back to the roots of historic Christian teaching.

Summary: Christian marriage has been designed by God to illustrate the loving relationship between Christ and His Church.

Proposition: We must embrace His good design for our marriages!

Interrogative: How can we do this?

Truth 1: A healthy view of marriage starts with a right relationship to God: 5:21 "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God..."

- **Two parts to this statement:**
 - **Each example demands a giving of self:** "Submitting yourselves one to another..."
 - Both members are willingly giving of themselves.
 - This giving is for one another but with a higher sense of duty.
 - **This self-sacrifice is rooted in reverence for God and His design:** "In the fear of God..."
 - His design is deliberate.
 - His wisdom is superior to mine.
 - I will submit to Him because I reverence Him.
- **Three Implications:**
 - Harmony is strengthened by humility and self-sacrifice.

- It is undermined by pride and selfish ambition.
- When people willingly submit to God's design and wisdom, they position themselves to enjoy the full blessings of that wisdom and design.

Truth 2: A healthy view of marriage embraces God's design for the structure of the home: 5:22-24 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing..."

- **Three Preliminary Cautions:**

- A wife should not focus on her husband's role.
- A husband should not focus on his wife's role.
- A healthy home has both husband and wife taking seriously their roles and walking consistently according to these instructions.

- **The term ὑποτάσσω:** To arrange oneself under another's authority.

- This term is different than the term used for a child's obedience to their parents.
- In this context it emphasizes voluntary cooperation that recognizes distinct roles and responsibilities in the home.

- **Negatively:**

- Not blind or childlike obedience.
- Not absolute.
- Not under compulsion.

- **Positively:** Wives must voluntarily put themselves under their husband's care.

- It starts with submission to God's design.
- It recognizes God's design for the home.
- It willingly embraces that design.
- It contributes to unity and good order in the home.
- It points to a bigger picture than the immediate.

- **The concept of being the head:**

- The passage does not say that husbands should be the head.
- It says that they are.
 - Example: We are salt and we are light.
 - Not: We should be salt and we should be light.
- The husband's headship is an inherent part of the design for the home, not something a husband strives to take or be.
- He is the head, no matter how he functions, because that is the inherent design of the marriage covenant.
- God will ultimately hold him responsible for the direction of the home, and how he functions in that role because he is the head.

- When he functions in a healthy way, it will promote the harmony and flourishing of his home.
- If he is functioning in an unhealthy way, it will create confusion, pain, and chaos.
- Husbands and wives are partners with different areas of focus in the home.
- **Christ is the greatest example of submission in His family: Luke 2:49-51** "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them..."
 - He is God in flesh.
 - He was being misunderstood by Mary and Joseph.
 - He spoke directly, yet respectfully regarding their misunderstanding.
 - He voluntarily put Himself under their care as an expression of respect for their role in His life.
- **Four Implications:**
 - There is a clear order in the home.
 - This order is by God's design.
 - We must choose to voluntarily submit to God's design.
 - This passage will draw out the most common struggles each member will face in submitting to God's design.

Truth 3: A healthy view of marriage never abuses one's role in the home: 5:25-29 "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church..."

- **The term: ἀγαπάω** Sacrificial love
 - **Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7** "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things..."
 - It starts with a standard.
 - It gives of itself.
 - It flows from the heart.
 - It takes responsibility seriously.
 - It does what is best for others.
- **The standard for love demands a complete death to self:**

- **Complete giving of oneself to the point of death: 5:25** "As Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it..."
- **As much as one loves himself: 5:28** "As their own bodies..."
- **A delight that initiated relationship and will never end: 5:29** "Even as the Lord the church..."
- **Implications:**
 - **Husbands must guard their hearts and always act in the best interest of their wife not themselves: Colossians 3:19** "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them..."
 - **God's design has a perfect balance of order, responsibility, and affection:**
 - **Ephesians 5:33** "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband..."
 - **1 Peter 3:7** "Husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life..."
 - "Weaker vessel" speaks of the wife's physical and societal vulnerability and the husband's duty to use his strength to defend.
 - This is the opposite of what a selfish man would do to exploit potential vulnerabilities.

Truth 4: A healthy view of marriage sees the big picture: 5:32 "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church..."

- **Our marriages should point people to the gospel's beauty:**
 - Husbands should model the care, wisdom, and self-sacrifice of our Savior.
 - Wives should model the faithful cooperation of the church in Christ's purposes.
 - Our relationship as husband and wife should model the sweet fellowship that Christ enjoys with His church.
 - Our homes should model the beauty of God's good design.
- **How closely do our homes mirror these expectations?**

Application:

- **Embrace God's design:** The Christian home should be...
 - Centered on the gospel
 - A place where commitment establishes security
 - A place that is well-ordered according to God's design
 - A place where free communication is natural
 - A loving culture
- **Embrace your role in that design:**
 - **Wives:**

- Cooperate with your husband as he bears the weight of responsibility in your home.
 - Pray for him.
 - Communicate with him.
 - Never undermine him, especially to your children.
- **Husbands:**
 - You are the head by God's design, so take that responsibility seriously and sacrificially love your wife after Christ's example.
 - Study your wife and know how to properly care for her.
 - Never use your role in a selfish or demeaning way.
 - Put God's word and your wife's needs ahead of your own.
 - Be committed to doing what is right even when it is hard and costs you.
- **To the unbeliever:**
 - The Christian home is designed by God to point people to Him.
 - Every family will fall short, some more than others, but do not miss what God wants you to see.
 - Christ loved you before you loved Him.
 - He went to the cross and laid down His life so you could be saved from your sins.
 - He calls you to turn to Him and place your faith in Christ.
 - Do it today!