

First Sunday After Easter
First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge
Ephesians 5:21-33
“Resurrected Relationships”
Pastor Jim Solomon
April 11, 2021

A mature-looking lady had an appointment with a Christian marriage counselor, and told him flat out: "I would like to divorce my husband." The counselor replied, "Well, do you have any grounds?" She answered, "Why yes. We have almost an acre." The puzzled counselor asked her, "What I want to know is do you and your husband have a grudge?" The lady answered, "Actually, we don't, but we do have a nice carport." It continued this way until the counselor said, "Ma'am, I don't see any biblical reason why you should divorce your husband." The lady looked at the counselor and said to him, "It's just that the man can't carry on an intelligent conversation." Sounds like a “match” to me!

The great philosopher Socrates said, “By all means marry; if you get a good wife, you'll become happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher.”

There's also a French Proverb that states, “A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple.”

And J. Paul Getty (1892-1976) who amassed great fortune, admitted, “I'd trade *all* of my fortune for just *one* happy marriage.”

So what's the deal with marriage these days? Well...

Marriage is as old as the family of human beings. It was first given to us by Our Creator, in the Garden of Eden, in the state of innocence, before we human beings chose our own will over God's will for our lives. Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, first gave marriage legal sanction. And our Lord Jesus Christ, while He was upon this earth, gave it spiritual sanction. Rightly regarded, marriage is the highest and the happiest of all human relationships, the preserver of true love, the foundation of the home, and the strength of society. For these reasons, Scripture exhorts everyone to hold marriage in high esteem, as not just a legal entity, but also a spiritual unity, and a lifetime commitment of two souls to each other and to their God.

But what happened? The lies of this world replaced the truth of God's Word in how we think, feel, and act in regard to relationships. Most of us didn't have great role models or even sufficient teaching regarding *God's design for marriage*. This sad situation has negatively impacted not only the relationship between a husband and a wife but even the relationship between a Christian and Christ, as marriage is a mirror of Christ and the church. As a result, whether you are single, married, divorced, or widowed, this message is for you—just as it is for me!

So how do we live God's Design for marriage? Let's look at Ephesians 5:21-33 for the answer.

First, church, put others above you (vs. 21).

In verse 21 we read, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

This is God’s Word to all of us as God’s church, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, currently married or not.

Submission: One word filled with many negative connotations and preconceived notions in our culture. Yet, it doesn’t have to be that way. Submission is simply putting aside your rights for the sake of another’s needs. That’s what Jesus did when He put aside His right to be held in high honor as the creator of all things (Colossians 1:16) and the master of the universe (Philippians 2:10-11) for the sake of our needs, namely, our need for forgiveness (Isaiah 53, Romans 3:23), salvation (Romans 6:23), and guidance in this life and the next (Hebrews 10:19-25). That’s true submission. And that’s what God wants for *all* of us, as it’s what’s *best* for each of us.

The church is the bride of Christ. If we are out of order in our heavenly relationship, we will be out of order in our earthly relationships.

In Philippians 2:3-11 we read:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Second, wives, help your husbands *lead* you (vv. 22-24).

Verses 22 through 24 of our text: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

Wives and future wives, submitting means being willing to *follow* your husband rather than *lead* him, even if you may be the more *natural* leader, in order to enjoy God’s *supernatural* blessings. But you would need to trust more in your heavenly husband than your earthly one to benefit from this arrangement.

Your husband needs *help* and encouragement in leading you as God wants him to lead you. Yes, sometimes this includes loving him enough to tell him what he needs to hear whether or not it’s what he wants to hear, yet in a way that is convicting but not condemning, productive and not

destructive, as it is truthful yet graceful. Then you will be helping him lead *you* the way Christ leads *him*.

In a culture that continually knocks men down, wives have the wonderful opportunity to build them up.

Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife, had unique circumstances. Some say they had the world's *only* perfect marriage. She couldn't talk about the man she might've married and he couldn't complain that his mother was a better cook!

Nevertheless, Adam was said to need a “helper” for many reasons. All husbands do when it comes to being all Christ created them to be.

When a wife does well in her role as helper, the husband is *secure* in his role as *leader* because his wife isn't trying to fulfill that role herself.

Helping your husband lead includes “submitting” your *thoughts, feelings* and *concerns* on any and every issue so that he has an opportunity to make the right decision on anything that would affect you and your family. It doesn't include submitting to anything sinful, illegal, or immoral. However, it may include submitting to what is *uncomfortable*, such as a move to another state based on his calling and career rather than yours.

You may have heard it said that marriage is more about holiness than happiness. Yet, happiness isn't the worst thing to desire. When I think about the few “happy” wives I've known over the years, some of them in their 90s now, and some long-gone, I think of this: A happy wife sometimes *has* the best husband, but more often than not, she makes the *best* of the husband she has.

That's why, once you say, “I do,” you never say, “I don't.” That's also why it's wise, *before* marriage, to refuse to be yoked to someone who refuses to be yoked to Christ, or you'll be heading in different directions and you'll be very frustrated in your marriage, which could then cause you to turn *from* Christ rather than *towards* Him. Don't settle through being unequally yoked. The couple that prays together stays together.

Also, *after* marrying, during times of trials in marriage, remember that God is the only third party in marriage that can make it work. Don't lose the vision of what Paul quoted from Genesis, the “one flesh” relationship, as communication and forgiveness along with repentance, leads to oneness, if you each do your part in turning over a new leaf where necessary rather than pointing the finger at the other person. Don't break your vows, as marriage isn't simply for better, for richer, and in health, but also for worse, for poorer and in sickness. Besides, *trials* are often what leads to *triumphs* in becoming less self-centered and more Savior-centered. Why? Because your ultimate fulfillment and contentment in life will come not from your husband's current *condition* as a spouse but rather your own eternal *position* as God's child.

Third, husbands, *help* your wives follow you (vv. 25-33).

We read in verses 25 through 33, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of *his* body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

It’s true that God’s Word exhorts wives to submit to their husbands. It’s also true that God’s Word commands husbands to love their wives. Wives, don’t think your husbands have the easier role! Husbands, don’t think your wives are your servants! Why not? In light of Genesis 1:27, 2:18-25, and the rest of God’s Word, we know that the two are equally significant but not “equal,” as they are not the “same,” nor would God want them to be. If that were what God intended, He would have created humanity with only one gender and some other creative way of reproducing itself. Instead, we have two. At the same time, we realize that God’s design for marriage is not the “dictator-doormat” model of marriage, whether the husband is the dictator or the wife is. Neither is it “Laisser-faire,” where anything goes. Finally, it is not a democracy and definitely not a “partnership,” where each spouse keeps track of how many contributions the other spouse makes to ensure that everything is tallied up in a way that is fair and equitable, without one party shorting the other when it comes to roles and responsibilities.

A husband is called to love his wife as Christ loved the church. In other words, a husband is called to die. To what does he die? He dies to himself, even his own rights, for the sake of his wife’s needs. And what does she need? She needs to be encouraged and empowered to be all that Christ created her to be as a woman, a wife, a mother, a contributor to the community, and a witness of Christ in this world.

What I’ve experienced over the last 26 years as Anne’s husband is that a wife will joyfully rather than begrudgingly submit to her husband’s leadership if he first solicits her thoughts, feelings and concerns on any and every issue before making a decision that would affect the two of them and their family. If he does this consistently, she will see that he is leading not so much for his own sake as for hers.

Husbands, and future husbands, or widowers who want to speak wisdom into the roles of other husbands, we can’t lead others unless we’re led ourselves. I find that if I don’t closely follow Jesus, I end up making it more difficult for Anne to follow me. Yet, she still is responsible to Jesus, not Jim, for submitting to me. Nevertheless, I’d be foolish to make that more of a burden than a blessing to her.

Anne once sent me a card that I used to carry around with me in the days of paper day-timers as a “reminder” to stay on the right path. It said, “It’s easy for me to stay behind you because you keep the Shepherd before you. Thank you for letting Him lead you as you lead me.”

As Ted Roberts, a pastor in Oregon, said, "When you husbands die, God will not ask you how successful you were in your careers or in your churches, He'll ask you if your wife is more beautiful today than she was when He gave her to you. Anne was beautiful not only outwardly but more importantly inwardly when He gave her to me. Today, I feel she is even MORE beautiful as I've seen her blossom in using her spiritual gifts of serving, discernment, and faith in the way she ministers to others for God's glory and not her own.

A farmer's boy decided to get married. His father said to him, "John, when you get married, your liberty is gone." The boy said he did not believe it. The father said, "I'll prove it to you. Catch a dozen chickens, and put them in a wagon hitched up to two horses and drive into town. Stop at every house you come to, and wherever you find the man is boss, give him a horse. Wherever you find the woman is boss, give her a chicken. You'll give away all your chickens and come back with two horses." The boy accepted the proposition and drove to town. He had given away ten chickens when he came to a nice little house and saw an old man and his wife standing out on the front lawn. He called to them, "Who is boss here?" The man said, "I am." Turning to the woman, the boy said, "Is he boss?" The woman replied, "Yes, he's boss." The boy explained his reason for asking and told the man to pick out one of the horses. The old couple looked over the horses carefully, and the husband said, "I think the black horse is the better of the two." The wife then said, "I think that bay horse is in every way the better horse. I would choose him." The old man took a careful look at the bay horse and said, "I guess I'll take the bay horse." The boy smiled and said, "No, you won't; you'll take a chicken."

If we men really lead our wives the way Christ leads us, we won't have to "wimp out!"

Husbands and wives, when y'all go home, please don't beat each other up but build each other up!

Let us pray.