

Marriage  
Ephesians 5:22-33  
4/10/2016

Our culture shouts at us all day long, "It's all about you!" My good friend Dr. Lig Duncan once saw a lady in a car, and on the back of that car was a bumper sticker that said: "It's all about you." Dr. Duncan said to himself, "Bless the hearts of all those who have to interact with you!" Most of us are probably aware that marriage involves two people becoming one flesh, and that therefore selfishness is a tremendous obstacle to a good marriage. However, knowing and doing are two different things. Before we get into the issues we are going to talk about today, two caveats are in order. Firstly, just about everyone's toes are going to be sore before the end of the message (including mine!). Secondly, if you are not married, this sermon will still apply to you, because marriage is a picture of our relationship to Jesus Christ. And so everything that I will be saying will apply to our relationships with Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if you are single, you will have (Lord-willing!) a better idea of how to pray for the marriages in our church.

Marriage has fallen on hard times, and the times are constantly getting harder. I saw a bumper sticker a while back that said "Marriage is the main cause of divorce." Our Lord would thunderously disagree with this statement. Our Lord loves marriage, but hates divorce. Divorce, however, is not the only thing giving marriage a hard time. The recent Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage is an attack on biblical marriage, because it encourages homosexual marriage. Premarital sex is also attacking marriage, since it means that people are much less willing to commit to a long-term relationship anymore. The sexual revolution that occurred in the 1960's is largely to blame for this problem. Our culture has gone much further, however, and is quickly seeking to catch up with Europe.

The first, and most important point that we must hold is that God tells us how marriage is supposed to work. We cannot, must not, take our cue from culture. There is no way in which our culture is more profligate, degenerate, naive, and galactically wrong-headed, than in this area of marriage. There is no area of marriage where our culture has anything even resembling the truth. They have distorted marriage until it more closely resembles a cage with straight-jackets for man and wife (if it even is man and wife!). And so, we must not listen to them. It is difficult to avoid, because our culture bombards us with its viewpoint all the time. You can't go to a grocery store anymore without magazines telling you the next great secret about marriage and/or sex. Do not listen to the culture on this!

Instead of listening to the culture, we must listen to the Bible. In life, it is generally the path of wisdom to listen to the inventor of something in order to determine what it means and how it works. The inventor of a clock can tell you its meaning, and how it works. The inventor of a machine can show you how to make

it work. God invented marriage. He created it and everything that goes with it. He created the relationship that He calls one flesh. God created marital intimacy. He created the world such that marriage produces children. Everything about marriage is God's invention. So *do* listen to the Bible about marriage.

The next point that is of crucial importance is that marriage was designed to look like Christ's relationship with His church. We will be unpacking that metaphor for several messages during this series. What does that mean for us?

For women, Paul says that it means submission. In verse 22, he tells wives to submit to their husbands, as to the Lord. Submission, what's that? That is a foreign word in today's vocabulary. Verse 22 might be one of the most hated verses in the entire New Testament these days, precisely because of this word. With the rise of feminism, especially in the 1970's, women have had a very hard time with this idea of submission. Instead, they tend to try to make the marriage relationship into a power struggle. The very idea that wives are supposed to submit to their husbands is anathema today. Anyone who suggests it is quickly labeled a patriarchal, misogynistic bigot. One day, however, all names will be restored to their proper owners. And we should not let culture's tendencies make us afraid to embrace anything the Bible says.

However, it is not just the culture that dislikes this verse. There are many in the church who dislike this verse. Incidentally, husbands, feel free to elbow your wives in the ribs at any time during this part of the message. However, if you so choose, just remember that with the measure with which you elbow your wife in the ribs, it will be elbowed to you when it is your turn. As I have said, however, there are many in the church who do not like this verse. For whatever reason, whether the church has drunk the koolaid of the culture, or whether some have been abused by men in the past, many women, even in conservative churches, do not like this verse. They think it does not apply to them. However, I want us to look carefully at this verse. Are there any restrictions on this command? There is only one restriction, and that is that wives are to submit to their own husbands. Women are not required to submit to every man. Only when there is a marriage relationship are the wives to submit to their own husbands. But there are no other restrictions. Paul does not say, "Wives, submit to your husbands, unless you don't really feel like it." He does not say, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, unless you can find a loophole that gives you a way out." He does not say, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, unless you have had trouble with abusive men in the past." Instead, Paul ups the ante by saying, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, *as to the Lord.*" Peter puts it this way, "For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." It is a measure of how far outside biblical paths our culture has gone, that the idea of wives calling their husbands "lord" today seems so ridiculous.

What are some ways in which wives find this command difficult today? There are a couple of obvious points in our church here and now that deserve attention. The first is scheduling. I have seen this often enough that it seems to be a pattern. If the wife decides she wants to do something, she basically commands her husband to work around her schedule without so much as a please. The husband has to drop everything he is doing or planning so that the wife can do her thing. Now, is it wrong for the husband to serve his wife? Of course not. He should be doing that all the time. But it is not her place to command it. The last time I checked, commanding someone is the opposite of submitting to someone.

The second example is that of marital intimacy. Many wives seem to think that they have a right over their own body, and if they want to, they can keep their husbands at arm's length. Some are even tempted to use sex as a weapon. Paul demolishes this way of thinking in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul says outright, "the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The Puritans, often maligned for being prudish, were nothing of the sort. It is a true story that a wife went to the session of a church and complained that her husband was not giving her marital intimacy. After due process, the church excommunicated the husband. Stop thinking of your own rights! Paul says you don't have any rights over your own body when it comes to this area.

Wives will typically think that if they submit in the way Paul suggests, then the husband will take advantage of the situation, and treat her like a carpet over which he can walk and stomp. This is more of whopper than Burger King sells, one of Satan's favorite lies. If your husband is a Christian, then the reverse is actually true. I know nothing calculated to gain a man's tender heart more quickly than wifely submission. The true Christian man will see her submission, and he will want to love her and sacrifice for her all the more. The last thing on a true Christian man's mind at that point will be taking advantage of her supposed vulnerability. Do not hold back from obeying the Word of God because you are afraid of how your husband might react. Trust the Lord.

That brings us to the husband. Notice that Paul does not say, "Husbands rule over your wives" in this context. That would be the temptation of the sinful nature. Instead, Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." If there is one overarching temptation when it comes to husbands, it is selfishness. Husbands (and fathers!) simply don't want to make the effort to sacrifice, because it might interfere with the game they're watching, or the game they're playing. Husbands and fathers do not naturally want to lead the home. If truth be told, most husbands would rather that their wives ran everything,

and made all the decisions. Oh sure, they'd like to be consulted on certain things, but if the majority of decisions were made by the wife, the husband would be happy.

Also, husbands are tempted to think of physical provision as being the only provision of importance. This is one of the most dangerous errors of all. In other words, he is tempted to think that if he provides a house, and money to buy groceries, and pay the bills, that he has done everything he needs to do as a husband and father. There is so much more than that! As important as providing for the physical needs of the family is, provision for the spiritual needs of the family is easily twice as important. We have talked for the last two Sundays about public worship and family worship. These two things need to be more important than paying the next bill, though, of course, paying the next bill is certainly important. Look at what Christ does for the church in verse 26: “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.” This is nothing less than salvation itself. That is what Christ does for His bride, the church. The analogy here for husbands is that you are required to cleanse your family spiritually through the Word of God. You are a “pastor” to your family.

Selfishness prevents husbands from seeing how important it is to take care of their wives physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Paul says that men take care of their own bodies. This is a given. We take showers. We exercise. We go to the doctor when something is wrong and troubleshoot our health. Do we take that much care of our wives? Are we, as it were, constantly taking their temperature to see where they are, and what they need from us? And are we willing to provide what they need? That ranks higher than watching the game on Saturday.

Husbands need to pay special attention to the emotional needs of the wife. Here men have trouble, because this is often a foreign landscape to them. Emotional needs are very real. Your wife needs to feel attractive to you, and beautiful. To you, she should be the most beautiful woman in the world, compared to which all other women fall short. She has an emotional need to be your woman. Never compare her looks unfavorably to anyone else. She also needs for you to listen to her when she talks. She needs your full attention when she talks, and she needs you to listen not just to what she says but also what she means, and what she is feeling at that point. This can be difficult to do, because it requires listening to more than just the literal meaning of what she says. Women typically communicate on many levels simultaneously, and it is very helpful for you to grow in that area as well. Learn her “tells.” If she is upset, she will usually give you clues, many of them nonverbal. Ask yourself what she is feeling as the result of the situation, and minister to that need. Never ridicule the emotional needs of your wife, especially if you have the emotional range of a millimeter. Don't think to

yourself that she should really just be more like you, calm and collected at all times, and everything will be fine.

For both husband and wife, it is very important to support each other. Never criticize your spouse in public. Let me repeat that: never criticize your spouse in public. That is profoundly disrespectful. I saw this a lot more in North Dakota than I see it here, but North Dakota marriages had some strengths that marriages here don't have. In North Dakota, the men really led, and the women truly submitted. The men were the leaders in the home. Many marriages here are practically matriarchal. Paul sums it all up in verse 33 by saying that the husband needs to love his wife, and the wife needs to respect her husband.

Marriage is the nucleus of the family. Without a strong marriage, we cannot expect to have strong children. Yes, God's grace may work in spite of our weaknesses. However, a strong marriage is so helpful to the raising of godly children. Mediate on the mirror of marriage, it's echo of Christ and the church.