

One in Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] So, here we are in Ephesians chapter 5. At the end, the passage that was read by Derek Hurley-Rodd, which is about marriage and how husbands and wives relate to each other.

I'm not assuming you're all Christians, so some of you may be in relationships where you've got a partner but you're not married. I hope that from what we look at in this passage here today that you also will be able to see the difference that Jesus can make in a family, in a home and in a relationship. Tyson Fury is a British boxer. Last year, he said, a woman's best place is in the kitchen or on her back. So, that's an incredibly chauvinistic statement and if we're frank and realistic about the kind of culture that we live in today, we live in a society where women are still treated very badly. They're paid less than men generally for doing the same jobs. Women are very often the victims of discrimination and abuse and violence.

Up to 60,000 women a year in Scotland are victims of domestic abuse. A decade ago, one in three teenage boys surveyed in Scotland thought that violence in a relationship was acceptable. So, this is the culture we live in and of course the culture invades the church.

And so, there's a real heart issue that we all have to grapple with about how we relate to others in the family home. Some of you will have lived in a home, grown up in a home perhaps, where the atmosphere is angry, controlling abusive and some of you may still live in that kind of environment. Sadly, marriage is often a place that reflects our brokenness. Anger, selfishness, laziness, control freakery. Often we hide stuff from others about ourselves that we feel free to express in the home because we know that our spouse or our partner will protect us. And so, often the person who is closest to us is the person that we treat most badly. And so, all of us have to think, how do I deal with my anger in the home? How do I feel about my marriage? Am I bitter? Am I resentful? How do I communicate with the person that I share life with day to day?

Am I rude? Am I uncommunicative? Am I harsh? Am I manipulative? The sad truth is that often marriage becomes a safe place for sin to flourish, but a difficult place for the family to flourish.

[3 : 3 7] And Christian marriages, marriages where Jesus is at the center of what's going on, should be very different in this regard. We've been working through Ephesians and Cornerstone for the last few months as well. And when I was thinking about Ephesians at the beginning, I was thinking, what would the letter to the Ephesians look like if it was a painting? So, I was trying to kind of visualize the layout of Ephesians. And Ephesians kind of begins over here with the world that has been created by God, but broken by sin and rebellion and selfishness. And so, on this side of the painting, it's dark, it's gloomy, there's a sense of fragmentation and brokenness. People walking in the darkness struggling with life. But Paul in Ephesians takes us on a journey towards the light. And on this end of the picture, we have the new creation.

God's new heavens and new earth free from sin and brokenness and violence. And here we have the church, God's community called together, walking together in life towards the new creation. And the life of this community reflects the beauty, the values and the goodness of the new creation. And it shines a light back into the darkness. At the centre of it all, of course, is the cross of Jesus that brings us from death to life and from darkness to light. Now, in chapter 5, Paul has already spoken to the church in Ephesus and said, you live in a darkened, broken society. They lived in a city that was full of all kinds of problems, but you are to be a community of light in the darkness. And so, when we think about marriage, we are being asked by Paul to say, how can our marriages, how can our families, how can our homes reflect the light and the beauty of the gospel into the darkness and the brokenness of the world around us? So that's kind of the question that we're going to struggle with and work through as we look at this passage is, what does a marriage look like when it's invaded by the beauty and goodness of the gospel? What does a marriage look like when it's invaded by the beauty and the goodness of the gospel? If you're a Christian, then you need to be working that out in your marriage relationship. If you're not a

Christian, then I hope you'll see the difference that Jesus can make in people's lives and see what a wonderful thing that is and that you'll begin to want it for yourself. And if you're not married, if you're sitting here thinking, well, I'm single, this doesn't really apply to me today, then I want you to think about this fact that all our domestic and home relationships should be a source of gospel light to the world. And of course, even if you're not married, you're going to have friends who are married and who come round to your house and whine about their husband or wife.

And you're going to have to be able to give them good godly advice about how to deal with difficulties in that kind of relationship. So what does a Christian marriage look like when it's invaded by the beauty of the gospel? I'm going to kind of reverse through the passage pretty much. I'm going to start with the husbands and how they are to relate to the wife. And then I'm going to talk about how the wife is to relate to the husband. So first thing I want to say is this, that the Christ like marriage is overflowing with the self sacrificial love of the husband. The Christ like marriage overflows with self sacrificial love from the husband. So we are told this very clearly verse 25, the print is almost too small for me to see here, husband love your wives in what way is Christ love the church and gave himself up for her. Now that is a really strong and startling and actually profound statement that Paul makes there in just a very few words. Christ love the church and gave himself up for her. What Paul is doing then is immediately taking her attention to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and all that lays lies behind that how Jesus takes the initiative in handing himself over to death on a cross giving up his life for his spouse, the church. This is the supreme demonstration of his love for the church. It's costly. It's self sacrificing. As Jesus went to the cross, he wept, he endured great pain, he was misunderstood, he was falsely accused, he was unjustly treated, he was humiliated, he was bruised and beaten, he was abandoned and alone. Jesus suffered for the church physically, emotionally and spiritually to the greatest possible extreme and then beyond that. And this is the model of love that Jesus lays down for husbands to love your wife in the most costly, self sacrificial and extravagant ways. Husbands are to make huge efforts to secure the happiness and joy of their wives. Husbands sacrifice their own interests for their wife. They give up their time, they give up their comforts, they give up their self indulgence because they love their wives and they will do everything they can to seek her best and serve her interests.

Paul says in these verses that in doing so, he brings back love to himself. Verse later on in verse 28, at the end of verse 28, he who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes it and cherishes it just as Christ does the church. So the more you commit to your wife in love, the more you create in your home an environment where love will flourish and multiply. The more you're going to be loved in return. The Bible tells us love your neighbor as yourself and in a marriage, your first neighbor is your spouse. That's your nearest neighbor.

[10 : 54] And so all that Paul teaches as an Ephesians about loving service of another, carrying one another's burden, speaking the truth in love, encouraging one another, building one another up, all of that is how you are to neighbor your wife in love. This of course has to be practical.

Christ did something for the church. He gave himself up. And so I want to say to those of us who are husbands that love has to be expressed in real and tangible ways. So for me in my home, loving my wife often means just doing things I don't really feel like doing. Making sure that I'm self-disciplined about making time to invest in my children and in their lives, to tidy the house, to do the dishes, to think about my wife, her needs, anticipate them and ease her burdens.

Sometimes we think the husband is simply there to provide, to give stuff, to provide financial strength and resources. But Jesus gives us so much more.

Jesus does not just give us what he needs. He gives us himself. Friendship, tenderness, gentleness, comfort, presence, joy. And so the husband has to commit to the wife in a similar way, in unconditional love and care. Now I just want to say then, if we're thinking about marriage as a way of letting the light of the gospel flood into the darkness of a broken world, then if you're a Christian husband here today, your love for your wife should be so extraordinary that your non-Christian friends are dumbfounded by it and find the way you treat your wife absolutely remarkable. They should be blown away by how much you do to serve your wife.

This is also of course about taking responsibility for the spiritual life and direction of your family and your home. We read about Jesus and the church that he gives himself up for her wife, 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, wrinkle, or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish, blemish. Verse 29, no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church. Jesus wanted to sanctify the church, present her to himself and enable her to be holy and blameless. So in marriage, husbands work hard to ensure their wives have the opportunity to grow to spiritual maturity. You're looking at your wife and you're saying, how do I serve her and love her in a way that helps her to become more and more godly and Christ-like? There's a parallel here. Jesus wants to nourish and cherish the church.

[14 : 32] Husbands are to nourish and cherish the wife. Later on in chapter six, as we think about parents and children, there's this idea of bringing your children up and then nurture and then structure of the Lord. So this whole idea then is of a family environment that is really nourishing and the source of the nourishment is the gospel. And we're bringing the gospel to bear in family life in every single way that we can. This whole part of Ephesians is governed by Paul's teaching in chapter four around verse 21 and 22, where it says that you were taught in Christ the truth that is in Jesus, to put off your old self and to put on your new self, to be renewed. Now that's a key thing to understand. We nurture people in the truth that is in Jesus. That's what brings about change. That's how we put off the old way of living, the darkened way of living and put on the new way of living by taking the gospel and massaging it into our lives more and more deeply, by bringing the gospel into the family environment and helping it to bring about flourishing. So Christian husband, your wife should be absolutely blown away by your devotion and passion to center your relationship around the gospel and to put the gospel at the heart of everything.

We're told here that the man shall leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So there's a reference then here in this teaching to the unity of husband and wife together. They become one unit, not two autonomous individuals living together. There's a deep union in marriage that reflects our union with Christ that you've probably been hearing about as you work through Ephesians. A wonderful, deep, mysterious, powerful connection.

This whole idea of one flesh comes from Genesis chapter two, this union between husband and wife. And in that passage, it says this, the Lord God said it is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. Now it's very easy for some chauvinists to read that and think, you know, God made me a helper. What does that mean? Well, somebody to do things for me, is it?

Well, there's bad news if that's the way you think. Because when God says it's not good for man to be alone, he needs a helper. He's not saying Adam needs help with the ironing, the cooking, and the cleaning. What's he talking about? Well, Adam's call is to reflect the image of God and creation. The God he is to reflect is a triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who has lived for all eternity in loving, serving relationship. For Adam to image God, he needs someone to love and serve. And so to help him image God, he is given a wife. The more fully and beautifully you reflect you serve your wife, the more fully and beautifully you reflect the image of God into this world. If you're not married, I want you to remember this, that the marriage relationship is just a reflection of a greater relationship. Marriage isn't the be all and end all of everything.

The greater relationship, of course, is that between believers and Jesus. Jesus is the perfect spouse. It's his love that makes us joyful and complete and fulfilled. And no person can ever take that place. If you think if I was only married, I would be so happy. Jesus says, I have come that your joy may be complete. It's him that makes life complete. And if you go into a marriage relationship thinking that another person can give you the joy that only Jesus gives, you're placing in that person an incredible and crushing burden. We go into marriage finding our completeness in Jesus and then free in the strength of that to serve and love others. So that's for the husband, the way the Christian life or the Christian marriage overflows with self-sacrificial love. The

[19 : 55] Christ like marriage secondly is to provide a safe environment for wives to flourish. So I want us to think a little bit about the wife here and how it speaks to the wife. It says, wife, submit your husbands as to the Lord. The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church, his body and isn't himself its savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit and everything to their husbands. Now that is really hard language for many people in our culture to hear and probably for some of us here. We hear that and we think, what on earth does that mean? What I want to say is this, that the loving self-sacrifice of a husband is what allows a wife to trust herself to his care and his gospel-centered leading.

And that's what Paul is talking about when he speaks of headship and submission. We've been told earlier in Ephesians that Christ is head over the church. And now we're being told the husband is head over the wife. There's an idea of headship here then that is similar but not identical. The husband is not the savior of the wife. The husband has a role that reflects Jesus but is not identical to Jesus' role.

So what is headship and submission? What's this language pointless to? I read an article, I think, in the independent newspaper a couple of weeks ago and it was talking about the presidential race in America and Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and it was reflecting on what drives people to seek political office. And the person who was writing the article, he tried to make a distinction between power over and power to. Okay, power over versus power to. So some people, they said, they want political power so that they have power over others. They're seeking control.

Whereas others seek political office because they want the power to help to serve. I knew a guy once many years ago who told me he really wanted to be an elder in the church, no one here, so that he could be in charge and the church would be so much better.

Power over. Some people join the police because they want the power to serve the community. Some people join the police because they want power over people. Some people get married because they want the power to serve and love another person. Some people get married because they want power over another person's life. When we speak about headship, authority, anything like that in a Christian context, it is not power over, it is power to. The power to love and serve.

[23 : 10] The power to give yourself. So to be head is a place of responsibility and service. What does it look like for Christ to be head of the church? We've already seen that, costly, self-sacrificial.

And what happens when Jesus gives himself up for us in this costly way? Well, he wins us, doesn't he? He wins us with his love. And as he wins us with his love, we deal light to do what pleases him. We are melted inside when we see the depth of his kindness and sacrifice. And so we willingly give our lives to serve. That's the context that Paul gives for the willing and voluntary submission. A husband loves, a husband's love wins his wife's heart.

It wins her trust. It wins her confidence. As he sacrifices himself, as he works for her maturity in the gospel, she doesn't fight against him, but willingly concedes to his input. She delights in his love. She responds with joy.

When a husband leads his wife more deeply towards the gospel, then that wife is greatly and wonderfully blessed. As a husband, one another's his wife, carrying her burdens, being her friend, loving her selflessly, then that marriage becomes a place where she can trust, yield, and respond to the self-giving love of the husband. How does all this happen in conclusion?

Well, I'll tell you how it works in my house. Every morning I wake up and the first thing that generally runs through my head is all the stuff that I've got to do that day. And then the second thing that runs through my head is all the stuff I want my wife to do for me that day. So I think about what needs to be done with the kids and what needs to be done in the home. And I'm thinking, oh, I hope Louise will do that. And I hope Louise will do this. And I've got a really good job list for her after being awake for about three minutes, probably. Most days I go through life just thinking about Neil McMillan, about me, my needs, my tasks, my problems, my opportunities, my work, and my work's so important. You know, it's really easy for me just to be a really self-absorbed sinner.

[26 : 06] And I daily give very little thought to the gospel nurture of my wife and family. Instead, I live with often an unspoken, but nevertheless real expectation that Louise's job is to make my life as easy and simple as possible. It's very selfish. And in this case, I need to learn from Christ. I need Jesus to take hold of my life, my thoughts, humble me, change me, so that I think about my wife and how I might serve her as Jesus served the church.

I need to think about my wife, what are her challenges? What are her struggles spiritually? What are the hard things for her at work and at home? How can I make her day easier?

What should I take on to ease her load? How do I lead her towards the gospel?

And that's me and my marriage. And hopefully it's you and your marriage. And if you're not married, you know, all this has to filter out from the gospel into all our relationships. All our relationships need to be changed by the gospel. At work, you'll see that in a couple of weeks.

At school, at uni, wherever you are all the time, the gospel is turning your life on its head, humbling you through the love of Christ to make you the servant of others.

[27 : 58] And that's only going to happen as we go back to the cross again and again, see Christ crucified, see how He is loved us and that love to be loved in that way by Jesus.

It just reminds us, He had to die for me. What a sinner I am. It annihilates our pride and our self-righteousness. And it makes us humble, thankful people.

And so if you're not a Christian this morning, I just want to point you towards that reality, a life-changing reality, that Jesus loves you, that He is willing to rescue you from the brokenness of your life. And He's there to give you joy, freedom and hope through His gospel.

And He invites you to repent, to turn your life round towards Him and trust Him for life, for your marriage, for your family, for your relationships and for eternity.

I'm going to finish there, see a short prayer and then we'll close off with us all. Lord God Almighty help us today to hear the gospel, to hear the tender loving voice of Jesus, to hear Him call us back to Himself, to rest in Him, to find life and hope and forgiveness in Him.

[29 : 33] And we pray as we hear the tender loving voice of Jesus, that that will be the tender loving voice with which we speak to our husbands, our wives, our children, to one another in the life of the church. May we truly reflect the glory and the beauty of the gospel in all our relationships we ask. Amen.