

Ephesians 5:21-33

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[0:00] So we've been going through this letter, the second half. We went through the chapters 1 to 3 in kind of Easter time. And then we've been going through chapters 4 to 6.

We've been starting it over the last few weeks. And one of the headline verses, I'm just going to remind you, it came right at the beginning of chapter 4. It said, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received or to walk in a way of the calling you've received.

And really, it's kind of the hinge of the letter, that verse. And what Paul is doing is he's explaining what it means to live as the church, as the church, and in so many different ways.

To not walk in darkness, but to walk in the light. To not walk in hate, but to walk in love. To not walk as foolish, but to walk as wise, he says, all the way through.

And then we come to chapter 5. And it gets real into the nitty gritty of life, of relationships. And there's a lot of stuff that's going to come out as we read it together that is challenging, but encouraging and beautiful about the gospel.

[1:07] And I'm just going to front it before we read it. I know that some of the stuff that's going to come out will challenge. There's some stuff about, you know, the big topic, the headline thing that it looks into is the marriage relationship.

And I know as I'm sat here, before we read it, that there's no one in the room that hasn't been affected by marriage in some way. As a child, you see your parents' marriage, and that could have been good, or it might not have been so good.

There's people, as you grow up, you see maybe you wanted to be married and you're not. And so reading this can be thinking, oh, what's this got to do with me then? And then there's also people who are married who kind of, you know, what it says here, you think, well, maybe your marriage isn't a great place, but also you think, well, this blueprint for marriage isn't quite what I see in my own life.

And so it challenges us, but it also encourages us, and it also helps us to draw near to Jesus for all the different relations, for the different ways that we've been impacted by it.

And so I just wanted to front that up before we go, so to get an idea of where we're going to head. I'm going to read it, and then I'm going to pray. So it's Ephesians 5, and we're starting at verse 21, reading to the end of that chapter.

[2:26] Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do 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 the saviour. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

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 their own body, but they feed and care for their body, 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.

[3:50] This is a profound mystery. But I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

This is God's word. Amen. Let me pray. Almighty God, we come to you, to your word, the Bible.

We thank you that this is the way that you have ordained and planned throughout the whole of history to speak to your people and to speak specifically to us today. And so I pray that wherever we're at in life, I pray that you'd speak to us collectively as a body, as a people, but that you would speak to us individually too.

I pray that you would shape and fashion us to become more like your son, and that you'd encourage us with the beauty of the gospel. I pray that we would be taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained in righteousness, that we might be equipped for every good work.

We ask for this in the name of Jesus. Amen. The celebration at a wedding is a beautiful thing.

[4:59] Culturally, I don't know if there's, maybe this does happen, probably does, in other nations, but culturally, I think we're the one nation where there's moments when a wedding doesn't just bring the UK to a standstill, but actually brings globally the world to a standstill.

What am I talking about? Well, a royal wedding. Over eight years, there is one couple that have continually been in our headlines.

They've just moved back. They did move away. I think you know who I'm talking about, Harriet and Megan. Perhaps you remember Saturday the 19th of May 2018.

Maybe you watched the ceremony on TV, the fairy tale story from rags to riches. The American actress who used to star in suits. A picture of her as a young girl sitting on the gates of Buckingham Palace, but now a princess.

And yet, for all the joy of that day, for them and all those watching, isn't this wonderful, isn't this marvellous, doesn't she look beautiful, that marriage, like most, has faced its fair share of turbulence ever since.

[6:22] When two people come together, it is actually natural. Maybe not quite on the Harry and Megan scale, but it is natural that there is ups and downs.

But, it's just, I know, I've started with a little bit of a silly illustration in some respects, because it's just totally not like our normal marriage, because of the attention and the publicity.

But the reality is that, you know, what we see in that is just a picture of where we're at as a nation, or where we're at in Western society when we think about marriage. People are actually getting married less and less.

Divorce is kind of normal. And the reality is, for a healthy marriage, needs to be worked at. A successful marriage doesn't happen. And I think it's because people go into that relationship and it's not what, kind of what people expect.

It's not the dream that they're sold. It's not the fairy tale that is promised. Maybe people come with expectations and I think it's that the relationship is there to serve them and meet their needs.

[7:34] Marriages in Ephesus were different to 21st century Scotland. I'm just going to say that from the front. Domestic life wasn't like how it is now. It was governed by what they'd call household codes.

The Roman legal framework granted almost absolute authority of the husband over his wife. Over the rest of his house.

Over his wife. Over his children. And as we see later in Ephesians 6, over his own slaves, which was commonplace back then. So back then, this is the context that we're reading this into.

The wives had very little rights or say. They were expected to yield completely to his every demand with very little expectation that actually the husband actually had to be faithful to her or actually that he had to go out of his way to meet her needs.

For those of us who are married, only you really truly know where you're at as a couple. But, I've said a lot about marriage.

[8:42] Today's passage isn't only for people who are married. But it actually presents each of us with, it presents us with an opportunity.

It presents the whole room with an opportunity because it presents people who are married with an opportunity to think about that relationship but not just the relationship between spouses but actually that it points to a bigger cosmic drama.

That our, that the marriages are there, they're the shadow that point to the true picture, the true royal wedding between Christ and his bride, between Jesus and his church.

marriage. That's the right, that's the place where we're going to go right here as we get, you know, the real key to a healthy marriage is not looking at our own, not looking at what we expect but as a shadow it's pointing to the true everlasting marriage to which all human marriages point.

The key to building something that is healthy is to actually model it on between the brilliant, amazing, wonderful gospel relationship between Jesus and his bride.

[10:00] For those of you, for those of us that aren't, you might be well saying, well, oh man, he's just like, he's never stopped talking about marriage since you stood up. What has this honestly got to do with me?

He's just talking to married people, I might as well just shut down and not listen because I'll listen next week. But actually it has everything to do with you because marriage has that deeper mystery to it, it means that it involves everyone.

It means that you get caught up into actually the cosmic drama because it points to how much Jesus loves you when we bring the picture into what it means between Jesus and his church. which brings us directly to this God's profound original design. The principle today really is this, marriage points to the loving union between Christ and his church.

Marriage points to the loving union between Christ and his church. All the way through the passage, there is this hint, it's all the way through, you see, it's not just in one verse but it keeps coming. It's the hint of what marriage is really all about, what human marriage is, it's all pointing to.

[11:14] If we were in any doubt as to what it is pointing to, we go all the way back to Genesis. Quoting from Genesis, you see that what he says?

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh and immediately afterwards, explaining that verse in for the New Testament church, for the whole of creation, this is a profound mystery, I'm talking about Christ and the church. Marriage is the wonderful, beautiful picture of Jesus uniting himself with his bride and the two becoming one in a covenant, a promise that is never revoked, doesn't contain any conditions. Every marriage is to be a pointer of that spiritual reality. You just think of the context that I sell. Given the context of Greco-Roman marriage, marriage, this was and it's radical.

In Ephesus, it meant the order of the whole household would be flipped upside down. It would have to change. It's why there's only, notice with me, there's only three verses that talk about wives and there's nine to husbands.

[12:35] It was the men whose lives would have to radically change. Because look at how the husband is called to love. He's called to love his wife, give himself up for her.

It keeps going through. Love his wife, give himself up for her, love her as his own body, feed and care for her, love her as he loves himself. And the question is, he says, it's to love his wife like Jesus loves the church.

Okay. love his love. it mean to love someone like Jesus? The word we have for love, there's different ones in Greek, because there's different types of love, but the word we have for love here is agape love.

It's the committed covenant love. It's the love of God for his people. It's the love that took Jesus to the cross for his bride. And so, guys, because Christ gave his life for the church, this is what it means for men.

It means we are called to lay down our lives daily for our wives. That is what leading as the head of the family looks like.

[13:59] And so, if we want our marriages to be healthy, in some respect we want, maybe, I don't know where you're at, they need to get us back on track. This is what it means.

And it means for husbands to walk in a manner worthy of the calling, to walk in the light, in the love and in wisdom. It's hard because our world does not paint this picture of marriage.

We're sold the fairy tale. Instead of loving covenant of mutually, of serving our bride, it means that, guys, we are the ones who our responsibility is to look like Jesus.

That is the husband's calling. You must die for your bride. You must look like Christ. Christ. So what is the, well, I mean, it's kind of obvious why this is a bit of a problem, where the problem comes from, isn't it?

I don't know about you, but this is, you say, when we say that the husband is to look like Jesus, it's kind of obvious why we fail to live up to that standard.

[15:14] The problem then, marriage is treated, I think, not as a union, but as we're treating it as a kind of a consumer contract. In Ephesus, this way of loving another was resisted.

We would see it primarily because the husband had the power, that was the status quo, being unfaithful and uncaring was normal. Our heart problem is the same, but our symptoms are different.

We live where relationships in general in our world are much more equal between genders. And so the problems are kind of, I don't think, not as heavily weighted in that sense.

In Ephesus, the women were submitting, they didn't have a choice. But I just want us to bring that word right to our attention.

I know when we're reading this that that word submit, I don't think that is the word that is on the tip of our tongues if you're explaining the hallmarks of a loving relationship, is it?

[16:19] What is a relationship about? Submit would not be the word that would roll off the tongue. Because when it comes to the wife, it makes the wife, the way that we think about that word, it makes it sound like she's a bit part player, like she's lower ranking and the husband can just do whatever he wants.

And so our culture, where we are in the 21st century, alongside the past 50, 60 years, the rise of feminism, even in the church actually, we read that and we don't know how to handle that verse. We don't know how to handle it. It doesn't know how to handle it because it comes with, unfortunately, it comes with historical precedent and in part the church continues to do this where this verse, this idea has been abused.

The irony is, it's totally ironic because I've just said the whole point of Paul writing this is to elevate the role of the husband to say he needs to love his wife like Jesus.

And the history of the church is we've taken that one verse and abused it. It's wrong and manipulative for a husband to quote this verse with domineering demands and expect blind submission.

[17:42] It is wrong. Jesus does not lead the church like that and he doesn't expect his husband to lead his wife like that.

Jesus is the servant leader who doesn't come to be served by people but to serve them. and give his life for them as a ransom.

If you wanted any more proof that blind submission is not expected look with me. Right at the beginning of the reading that I said what does it say? It says submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

the husband's submission is he submits in a way that he is the head who lovingly serves his wife and the wife submits with respect and trust and faith and a choice in that God's word has set this way out that this is the best way the blueprint for how a couple come together.

They are different the man and the wife and they come together to the husband lovingly serving and dying for his bride and the wife in return submitting to his loving servant leadership.

[19:09] A couple brought together by God are not competing with one another about whose needs get met but they're on the same team. They're two sides of the same coin as the husband looks at his wife and thinks of what she needs to be cherished, blessed, helped, protected, and made holy.

Prayerfully does these things and lays down his own agenda, his own needs and desires to serve her. That's what leading looks like, being the head. Equally, when the wife looks at her husband, she sees how he needs to be cherished and blessed and helped and protected and prayerfully she puts her desires to one side and shows respect to his servant leadership.

To submit doesn't mean being a doormat. It might even mean speaking up when there's disagreement, even if she prefer not to as a way of blessing and helping with his holiness, with helping him be that leader.

It means the husband putting to death his desires to be right when his ego is challenged. marriage is when husband and wife selflessly give up for the benefit of the other.

The husband lovingly dies to self and the wife lovingly submits and respects. Okay, set it out plainly.

[20:41] A marriage is two sinners coming together. This is why this is a blueprint but we can't do it. Because it's two sinners coming together. We come and we expect perfection from the other and we want them to be who we want them to be and who, you know, we come and we have all these expectations but even the best spouse in the world will get it wrong because we come and we're not perfect.

When we have that expectation, what happens is in our heart, we're treating them, we're placing the expectations on them that was never meant to be theirs to carry.

Your spouse is not able to carry the weight of your expectation. It's impossible. And if we live demanding our needs be met when they're not, this is what happens.

This is what happens when our needs aren't met and we expect them to be. We will inevitably descend into point-keeping score, bitterness, and just quiet exhaustion. that's just amplified even louder when the sink's full, the kids are screaming and you just feel unappreciated. If you're sat here this morning and this is grabbing your heart, it's twisting it a little bit, if you realise perhaps that maybe you've contributed to unhealthy expectations or maybe you've demanded too much, and this blueprint feels like a million miles off, you're in the right place. [22 : 20] Because there is one who is able to carry the weight. It's the true bridegroom.

who carries the weight, who can bear on his shoulders all our expectations. This is the gospel. Jesus loved the church and gave himself up to be in union with his bride. God. Verse 25 tells us that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Why? Well, verse 26 gives us the reason. The reason he loves the church, the reason he gives himself up for her is to make her holy. That is the good news.

That is salvation right there. we bring us back to Harry and Meghan. When they got married, you know, she had a certain amount, you know, she was famous in her own way, but actually it's Harry who brings to the table the royal title, the status and the honour.

[23 : 41] the reason that the marriage is seen globally is because of who he is. And when they join together, she receives everything that belongs to him.

But he takes on everything that she brings as well, which in comparison to being royal isn't as much. Now, that's just a shadow, isn't it?

It's a pointer that this is what happens at the cross. in our union with Christ, the exchange is much greater. Because Jesus takes on, we come with nothing, we come with zero, we come with zero into the relationship.

We come with poverty, we come with all our sinful mess, we come with nothing. But Jesus takes on our poverty and we receive his royal riches.

Our spiritual bankruptcy becomes his, but he gives us his unlimited spiritual blessings. He absorbs our spiritual sin and mess and failure and he dies because of it.

[24 : 47] It kills him. It separates him from his father and he takes the anger of God, he takes the punishment, the debt we couldn't pay. The Lord Jesus Christ pays in full.

It's the great exchange that takes place. He dies because of our sin and gives us his righteousness that we can have everlasting life. That's what it says. He makes us holy. We receive his holiness. He makes us holy. The church is the bride that he dies for. His death is the proof that he would do anything for her. And so we are united to him.

He loves his own body. What does Paul say that we are to be? Whatever Paul says us to be, this is what Jesus is. Paul says that husbands are to feed and cherish their wives.

Jesus feeds us. He continues to feed us with his word. He continues to cherish us and warm us with his tender care. When we're in on empty gently sustaining us as the exhausted bride.

[25 : 52] What that means is that all the times we've messed up, and it actually means it for the ways that we've sinned against others in our marriages, when we've dominated and demanded, wherever our marriages are, it means that there is hope, that there is forgiveness, because Jesus wants those relationships to point to him.

He is for your marriage more than you are. Isn't that a beautiful thing? He's for your marriage more than you are. He wants it to point to the gospel reality.

He forgives and he's at work in both of you, so you have a gospel reflecting union. keep coming back to it, this message of forgiveness, of being united with Jesus is not just for married people, it's the message for the whole church.

It's why I've said that thinking about this is important for all of us, because he treats every single one of us, the church, as this perfect loving husband.

husband. He gives us his riches, he gives us his perfect record. And really, at the cross we see, you know, we've talked about dying and we've talked about submitting.

[27 : 16] At the cross we see Jesus do those two things. He loves his bride as the head, but he also submits to the Father's will, the night before he dies.

Jesus' life is submission in obedience and he gives you his perfect record of submissive obedience to the Father where you receive his perfect record.

How do we respond? This is how we respond. We get to rest in our union with Christ as his bride and reflect his design for marriage. The opportunity today for everyone is to really, it's such a gospel

way of thinking about what Jesus has done that every one of us, it elevates how we think about what Jesus has done for us and elevates how we think about those of us who are married but also elevates about the importance of it for our church.

Healthy marriages mean a healthy church. They mean healthy families. The marriage relationship is one of a quality, they're two sides of the same coin and this is how we get to live now, empowered by the Spirit of God.

we get to live lives, we get to live marriages where husbands, the Spirit of God changes us as we turn away from the ways that we've done, we get to live lives where we serve one another and wives get to offer genuine servant-hearted support and genuine respect.

[29 : 11] It's not how the world does relationships and it's impossible to do in our own strength or willpower. you might remember last week, verse 18, Paul says, be filled with the Spirit.

It's only as we're filled and empowered by the Spirit that we can submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. It's only by the power of the Spirit that we get to have marriages that point to Jesus. Jesus is at work and he's at work in the church and he's at work to present you to the bride, to present you as his bride, to present you as himself.

Just look with me, there's this staggering verse about what Jesus is up to. Look with me. It says, verse 25, read with me, 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 here we have it, listen to this in verse 27, and to present her to himself, to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.

Jesus is at work in each of us to present us to himself. Now, the big moment in a wedding, we've all been to them, is when the bride walks down the aisle, right?

[30 : 37] She's been preparing us, she's probably been up quite pretty early, the whole team being, you know, everybody's getting ready, doing makeup, hair, and so when she, that moment when she steps through the doors of the church, she looks million dollars, it's a beautiful moment, the whole room, not just the, the whole room turns and looks at the beauty that is on display.

Now, I've never been to a wedding. Where the husband-to-be is involved in getting his wife ready. That would be bizarre, wouldn't it? That's not the done thing.

At least, if you know someone who has, then that would be the first, the husband putting on the wife's makeup and doing her hair. I've never heard of that. Have you seen that this is what Christ does for his bride?

Jesus is the only groom who does the work of beautifying his own bride by his own blood. In giving himself up for her, he makes her holy.

We're united to him now, we're his bride now, but we're being prepared, we're being sanctified, we're being made holy, made perfect by him so that he can present us back to himself as radiant and a fitting church for him, as a church that looks like him and is fitting for him.

[31 : 57] It's pointing forward to where all this is headed. A few times in the service, it's come from roaring, different points, we've talked about Jesus coming back. Sometimes it's the word that we use in the church is the consummation.

It's where the church, as people of God, where we've actually been made holy, we've been made perfect and we look completely like Jesus. You know, the true royal wedding doesn't happen at Windsor Castle or Westminster.

No, no, where the bride being prepared for the true bridegroom brought into eternal union with him. And Jesus' grace for our marriages is empowering us, not just for our marriage, but for each of us sat here, is empowering us, preparing us so that we will be the church, so that in our day-to-day lives we're becoming more and more like the bride that will look beautiful on that day.

It's empowering us every day to live lives to look like that bride. And his grace is there to cover all the relational mess, all the times when we've got it wrong.

Whether we're married or single, a human relationship will always come up short. It was never designed, our human marriages were never designed to save us. Wherever we're at, we are not lacking anything, ultimately.

[33 : 18] We are already fully cherished as the royal bride of Christ. Today, today, rest in your union with him. Receive his grace and his love that only he, the true bride, can provide.

And so as we come, as we're coming for landing, so to speak, today, there is hope for your marriage, wherever it is, to either get it back on track or just keep heading on in the right direction.

We'll all have ups and downs.

None of us, husbands, we can't be like Jesus. This is the blueprint and it's a tall order, but this is kind of the model. But it's pointing to the fact that Jesus died and gave himself up for his church, for each of us, to pay for our mess, to make us solely so that we could be a church fit for him.

And I just want to finish with kind of, maybe it's an aside, I don't know. Wherever we're at, we see that this relationship, between married people, it's the one, it's one of the relationships, the key one that actually points, the way that we live, points to the gospel.

Isn't that a precious thing? And so, let's pray for our marriages. If Christian marriage is there to display the gospel, then it will come under attack like nothing else.

[34 : 49] And we need the bridegroom. We need him to pray to him. We need him to ask him to guard our homes, to guard those relationships. We need help from one another to keep going and sustaining and looking out for one another.

Jesus Christ is the bridegroom who pays for all your mess, for the eternal union. And one day, wherever you're at, we will, as the church, be the bride of Christ that look like him.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we just praise you for what you, who you are and what you do and what you will continue to do until you come back.

We thank you that you brought us into a right relationship with you. We thank you that you are the true bridegroom, Lord Jesus. That you gave yourself for us. And we thank you that each and every day you're making us more like yourself.

I pray for our marriages. We commit them into your hands. We know that you are for them more than we are. And so I pray that you'd protect those relationships.

[36 : 14] We know that there's ups and downs. I pray that we take this on board and that you would empower us by your spirit to see this blueprint here. And by the power of the spirit live it out.

But this is the way that we would walk in a manner that is worthy of the calling that we've received.

And so we ask you for help, for blessing, for peace. Help us to rest in our union with you.

That we're connected to you. And that you would do anything for us. We see that by your death for us. And we praise you that you are the one that we need. Bless us we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.