




HUSBANDS and WIVES (Eph 5:21-33)








(Noosa Anglican, 03/06/18)

*** **JOKE 1:** You've probably heard the old line – My wife and I had 25 wonderful years – then we met each other and got married!

*** **JOKE 2:** Or maybe you've heard this old joke: A husband and wife are playing golf together. As they walk down the fairway, the wife says, "Honey, if I died, would you remarry?" **HUSBAND:** "Oh, I don't think so." **WIFE:** "I think you should." **HUSBAND:** "OK, I guess so." **WIFE:** "If you remarry, would you let her drive my car?" **HUSBAND:** "I suppose so." **WIFE:** "Would you let her use my golf clubs?" **HUSBAND:** "Oh no! I couldn't possibly let her do that! She's left handed!"

THE SAD STATE OF MARRIAGE TODAY

Unfortunately, those two old jokes fairly accurately reflect the low view of marriage and marital fidelity in today's society. The sad truth is that marriage isn't doing all that well in the 21st century.  Here are some disturbing Australian statistics from the Barna Research Group:

-  1 in 3 marriages end in divorce
-  The average marriage lasts for 11 years
-  Every day in Australia there are 320 marriages and 170 divorces
-  People who are sexually active before marriage are 40% more likely to divorce
-  Percentage of wives who admit to having an affair – 14%
-  Percentage of husbands who admit to having an affair – 22%
-  Percentage of marriages that fail after an affair – 69%

Sadly, for those who don't get divorced, marriage is often no fairy tale. Marriage can be pretty grim for some people – it can be a place of abuse – physical, sexual, emotional – it can be a place of unmet needs, of tension, frustration, anger, resentment and even loneliness. The fact that some marriages don't end in divorce certainly doesn't mean that they are wonderfully happy.

Maybe I'm speaking today to some couples who are struggling – who have lost their joy, their intimacy, their love - and who are just co-habiting – just grinding out a grim co-existence day by day. Today's Bible passage offers real hope for **all** marriages – because if we put these principles into practice they can transform your marriage into the fulfilling relationship that God intends it to be.



THE SAD STATE OF MARRIAGE IN THE 1ST CENTURY

Paul, as he wrote these guidelines for marriage, was addressing a world where marriage was in equally bad shape. It was a world where divorce was common, adultery was rampant and women were treated incredibly poorly.



Jewish Marriage: The Jews had a prayer in their Talmud which every devout male prayed at the start of every day: "God, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave or a woman". In 1st century Jewish customs, the woman had no

rights, and was regarded as no better than a possession. By the time of Jesus, a Jewish man could divorce his wife if she displeased him for the most trivial of reasons.



Gentile Marriage was worse: (And Ephesus was a gentile city). It was widely accepted that a man would have mistresses and could avail himself of prostitutes any time he felt like it.



Demosthenes, the Greek scholar, wrote, *"We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure, we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation, and we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and administering household affairs."*



Bible commentator, **William Barclay**, states, *"The woman of the respectable classes led a completely secluded life. She took no part in public life; she never appeared on the streets alone; she never even appeared at meals or at social occasions; she had her own apartments and none but her husband might enter into them. It was the aim that she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."*

This is the world in which Paul is writing. This is the appalling view of marriage that he is addressing. And the principles he proposes are radical. They were radical then and they are still radical today. And if we put them into practice, they can transform your marriage.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR HUSBANDS (I want to deal with husbands first)

Guys, did you notice that the instructions for husbands are 3X as long as the instructions for wives? I'd really like to think that it's not because we're a bunch of block-heads ...



Paul's instructions are, in one sense, really, really simple ... **"Husbands LOVE your wives!"** (v.25) Love them! That's it in a nutshell. But the problem with words, and particularly a word like "love", is that people can attach all sorts of misconstrued meanings to them, so just to be absolutely sure that us blockheads get the message loud and clear, Paul gives us 3 powerful definitions – very specific descriptions of what this love should look like – the love of a husband for his wife.



1. LOVE YOUR WIFE AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH (vv.25-27)

Now here's the thing: Jesus DIED for the Church – He died to save us and make us His Bride (and there is a beautiful analogy between husbands and wives and Christ and the church in this passage). But the point we're meant to get



here is that **JESUS LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS BRIDE** (the Church). *"He gave Himself up for her"*. And that is how we husbands are meant to love our wives. Sacrificially. Selflessly. Putting her needs before our own, even when it isn't convenient. It wasn't convenient for Christ to die on a cross. Jesus didn't feel like being tortured and crucified. But He laid down His life, because He loves us, and now he says to husbands – go and love your wives like that.

WOW! I don't know about you guys, but there's a big FAIL right there for me. I certainly can't say I do that all the time. But the extent to which I do it, is the extent to which I am loving the way I was meant to. Loving with Christ's love. Loving sacrificially and selflessly. But what does that look like in practice? In every-day life?

*** I recently read the testimony of a wife who said: *"My husband came home late from work one night, obviously exhausted. But he could see I had had a bad day. So, he sat me down in the lounge room, and he went into the next room, slipped into something more comfortable, put on some soft music, and after a few minutes I could hear the sound of running water and I could smell the aroma of scented soap. My heart skipped a beat with anticipation, because I knew exactly what he was doing – he was washing the dishes."*

Now, I don't want to equate washing the dishes with dying on the cross, but the point is – sacrificial love is expressed in a million little ways every day. The way you put HER needs first, before YOUR OWN.



2. LOVE YOUR WIFE AS YOU LOVE YOUR OWN BODY (vv.28-29, 33)



²⁸ *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*²⁹ *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—*³⁰ *for we are members of his body. “*

Now it seems to me that some of us have bodies that are more lovable than others!

I don't tend to step out of the shower and stand naked in front of the mirror and say to myself, *“Well hello there handsome! MmmYou're looking mighty fine!”*

What Paul is referring to here is the way we automatically acquiesce to our body's needs, how we moment by moment meet our own body's needs for food and drink and oxygen and rest – without needing to think about it or question it. We are constantly in tune with our own body's needs, moment by moment, and Paul is saying that our goal should be to care for our wives in the same way. To become so in tune with her needs, that we know how she feels and what she needs without her having to ask or beg or cajole.

Now guys, I know what you're thinking: *“Man, I have enough trouble understanding her when she **tells** me what she wants! How the heck am I supposed to work it out on my own?”* Believe me, I'm feeling your pain guys! I'm right there with you!

But I believe that the more we focus on her needs and not ours, the more instinctive our love will become. And I guess



that's how I would explain the kind of love that this passage is talking about – it's love that is **instinctive** and **constant**, in the same way that we care for our bodies **instinctively** and **constantly**. It never stops. I don't stop eating for a week because I've had an argument with myself. I don't stop breathing for a couple of days because I'm feeling grumpy. My love for my body never stops, and neither must my love for my wife!



3. LOVE YOUR WIFE WITH COMPLETE FIDELITY (vv.31-32)

Now we come to the wedding verse!



³¹ *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

The one that is read at some point in most Christian wedding ceremonies. It's a quote from the creation story, in



Genesis 2, which Jesus also quotes in Matthew 19 and adds the words, *“Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt 19:6)*. Guys, we are to bind ourselves physically, emotionally and sexually to our wives, and to no one else, until death do us part. And our love and devotion to our wives must be greater than our devotion to any other person on the face of the planet. Greater than our love for parents, or children, or brothers or sisters. She must be the recipient of our greatest love.

*** MY FIRST WEDDING CEREMONY AS A CELEBRANT ... and I read to him this verse about leaving your father and mother and being joined to your wife

>>> You may not have had such a dramatic encounter, but in lots of little ways every day we need to decide, *“My wife will have first priority in my heart”* (apart from God) – *“I will love her more than any other person, and I will be solely devoted to her, because God has made us one in Him.”*

OK – Husbands that’s you done



INSTRUCTIONS TO WIVES (vv.22-24, 33)

Now I know that you’ve all been waiting for me to get to this bit about wives submitting to their husbands. So, let me get it over with now - *Wives, you must obey your husband’s every command, utterly and completely and unquestioningly, because he is your master and you are his servant.*

Well thanks for having me here today. I hope you’ve enjoyed the message. Mark can answer any other questions you have about anything that I’ve said Just kidding!

But let me say, that the extreme view I just articulated is the interpretation that some people try to pin on Paul in this passage, and it’s just not right,



Let’s read these verses ... *“²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

We are we to make of this? Is this a timeless truth or just a 1st century cultural thing? I do believe it is a timeless truth, because Paul doesn’t appeal to transitory cultural norms here, he appeals to the timeless headship of Christ over the church. So, yes, I believe that male headship is part of God’s created order for husband and wife, and in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul elaborates this point further, appealing to the creation of Adam and Eve in the beginning.

BUT ... and this is where people take this out of context all the time – the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife **MUST** be read in the context of everything that we have already discussed. The headship of the husband is a headship of sacrificial, selfless, constant, singularly devoted LOVE. This is not some kind of authoritarian dictatorship that the Bible is advocating – the husband is to be the leader in loving his wife. He is the instigator and initiator of sacrificial, selfless love, as Christ is to us.

That this is not a dictatorship is evident in the very first verse of this passage:



“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v.21)

Ladies, you aren’t being asked to do anything that your husband is not also being asked to do. Husbands and wives are to submit to **each other** – to put the other person’s needs first. And if we all did that perfectly every day, we would have the most glorious marriages.

HEADSHIP AND SUBMISSION


Having said all that, however, I can’t escape the fact that this passage does teach distinctive roles within marriage: husband and wife, headship and submission, and that this relationship reflects, to some extent, the relationship of Christ to the church. Notice the injunction given to wives – twice in 3 verses:






v.22 “Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord”

v.24 “As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands”

While mutual submission is the overarching context of the marriage relationship, I think it’s difficult to deny a God-ordained leadership in the relationship of husband to wife. But it’s to be a gentle, loving leadership rather than a harsh, authoritarian one.

*** The best way I can explain this is  BALLROOM DANCING. It just doesn't work if both people are trying to lead! One person has to lead and the other follows. And when that happens it's beautiful. It's harmonious. And notice two things:

1.  The leadership is subtle and gentle. The barest of touches and shifts in balance are all that are needed to signal a change of direction and send them swirling across the floor in perfect harmony.
2.  It only works when they are both holding each other closely and intimately. It doesn't work if there is a gulf between them.


The other injunction for wives that needs to be mentioned here is the instruction, in verse 33 for wives to  "respect your husbands". It's interesting isn't – the primary call upon the husband is to LOVE his wife, whereas the wife is called to RESPECT her husband. And I think that this, too, this difference in language, speaks of the inherently different roles God has ordained for them within the marriage relationship.

CONCLUSION

You might have some questions that I haven't had time to answer this morning. Questions like: What if my husband isn't a Christian? What if he isn't loving me the way he should? What if my husband is cruel or neglectful? What if my wife doesn't respect me? If the husband is the head, does this mean he is the ultimate decision maker?

Mark has produced a helpful handout with brief answers to some of those questions, and if that isn't sufficient then I am sure he would be happy to talk further with you.

*** But let me finish with a story ... THE RESENTFUL WIFE AND THE WISE COUNSELLOR

 When you love sacrificially, and selflessly, you change the one you love, and you transform yourself in the process. The secret to having a loving marriage is not to seek love, or demand love, but to give it.