

A Marriage Made in Heaven - Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, St. Silas. Thanks, Angela, for reading. We've arrived at this controversial passage, and as Darren said, we're resisting the temptation to skip over it. One of the great benefits of working through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, is that God sets the agenda, and we don't just pick the bits that we like, we're committed to the whole of the Bible being God's word for us today. So even if we find it hard, we're going to look at that together. But let's pray, and let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Father, we ask for your help as we come to hear your voice in the scriptures this morning. Graciously enable us to meet with you in all of your goodness and love, and change our hearts within us so that we are ready to change and choose to follow you.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it'd be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Ephesians, chapter 5. That's on page 1176, if they've fallen shut. And as always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you'd find that helpful, just to see where we're going and follow on as we look at that together. So this is the longest treatment of marriage in the whole New Testament, and we're going to spend two weeks on it because it's so rich.

But you can see that it's part of a bigger section in Ephesians, as you just look at this section. And it's one of those sections where your elbow is very useful, you see, because it addresses wives, and the husbands can elbow their wives. Are you listening to this? And then it addresses the husbands, and there's much more for husbands. So 40 words for wives, 115 for husbands. So the wives, you can get your elbow out, and they elbow them back. Are you listening to this? Then it speaks to children, and you can elbow your kids, and then the kids, and then it says fathers, and the kids can get their own back. So it's get your nudge on time. But what we really need to do is think, well, what's this saying to me personally, and how does God want me to live differently? If you're not married, this is still such a relevant passage of the Bible, because all Christians are called to be part of a church family. And one of our roles in that church family, single or married, is to support the marriages in our church, to pray for married couples, to do our best to help marriages flourish, because they're so important to God. But we're also in a bit of the Bible that we might profoundly disagree with. And so my second question, just in the handout there, inside the notice sheet, was about, do you have a Stepford God? And there was this movie,

The Stepford Wives. I don't know if you've seen it. It was in the 70s. Then it got remade with Nicole Kidman. Her and her husband moved to this suburb and into Stepford. She meets the wives. They're all really weirdly similar. They all do the same things. They all dote on their husbands all day.

They realize over the course of the film that actually the wives have been turned into robots. The men have got fed up with their own wives, and they program these robots to be their wives that just say, yes, dear, yes, dear, yes, dear, whatever they say. And of course, the women are creepy, because there's no personal relationship at all. They're just robotic. The problem is that many of us are guilty of having a Stepford God. You see, we want a God that's just a bit bigger than us.

[3 : 31] So he's there and powerful to help us when we need it. But really, we want him just to affirm our values. When we say things to God, he just says, yes, dear, yes, dear, whatever you want.

And when we come to a passage like Ephesians chapter 5, we wriggle a bit. We either think, this can't apply today. It must just be for the culture at the time. Maybe at that time, that's how, that's what people expected. Or we even might think, Christianity can't be true because this moral teaching, I think it's wrong. But just think about that and how, really, if we're tempted to think like that, it's actually, we're in danger of being arrogant as we come to the Bible. You see, if God really did make the universe, the world, all of us, and if he really has given us his word that transcends every culture and time so that he can speak relevantly to everyone, whatever part of the world they live in, whatever time they grow up in, how could we not find things in the Bible that in 21st century Glasgow we really disagree with?

Why would we, how could we expect that God wouldn't disagree with us? And so we have to ask ourselves, when will you let your God disagree with you? If you have a step for God, there's no relationship, there's no real opportunity for God really to speak truth into our lives and help us to change.

So when we come to bits of the Bible that we disagree with, or we find very confronting or challenging, we shouldn't dislike that. It's actually a good thing in our walk with the Lord, because these are the times when perhaps God can really work with us the most and really change us.

Last thing to say before we dive in, I think it's important to think, have you fallen into the trap of thinking you are what you do? You see, our culture tends to tell us that your value comes from your role in life. So if you're a doctor, or you're a successful businessman, or you're a sports star, you're more valuable than other people in our culture. And if you're unemployed, or you're a stay-at-home mum, or you're a road sweeper, or a janitor, you're less important to people. Your status is affected by your role in our society. But God tells us that's absolutely not true.

[5 : 58] Every person, no matter what you do, no matter what you get paid, every person is valued by God because they're created by him in his image to wear his badge as one of his people in the world.

And we know that different roles don't affect your status because of God himself. You see, God the Son was sent into the world by God the Father. The reason we know God the Father loves us is that he sent the Son. The Son was his to give. And he died on the cross because he loves God the Father. In Gethsemane, he said that he would have the Father's will done rather than his own will. And all of that time, he was still fully God. So our culture has that wrong, profoundly wrong. Submitting to someone doesn't devalue you. It didn't devalue Jesus to submit to God the Father. So let's look at Ephesians 5. And I've got three questions to help us as we look through. The first is, what does the spirit-filled wife do? The answer is in verse 22. If you have a look, wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

Is it just cultural? Something outdated? Well, some things in the Bible are for a particular time or place. The key is to look at the reason that's given for the command. Is that reason something temporary or is it something that still applies today? So have a look with me at verse 23.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Christ is still the head of the church today. Husbands are still heads of their wives. In verse 31, we'll see that Paul goes back to God's good design and creation to justify this teaching. It applies to every time and culture. And when you look at that word head that's used of the husband, no matter how often you look at it in different contexts and how it's used, it's a word that carries with it the idea of authority. So let's think first about what this doesn't mean.

I've got a few things that it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that women are inferior. The Bible is very clear about that. Men and women are equal. But equality doesn't mean sameness.

[8 : 37] Equality doesn't mean sameness. Men and women are different to each other. That's why that book, you know, men are from Mars, women are from Venus, that's why it was so popular. Because it spoke into things we already know that men and women are different. And in a marriage, men and women have different roles to play. It doesn't mean oppression. It certainly doesn't justify domestic abuse, which is a horrible sin. It doesn't mean that women submit to men. It says wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands. And the word used is about submitting yourself. It's a deliberate word used for that.

Not be forced to submit, but a voluntary act by the wife of accepting the authority of her husband. It doesn't mean that a wife should submit when her husband asks her to do something ungodly or sinful.

Because the wife's submission to Christ comes first. Submitting to her husband is part of her submission to Christ. It doesn't mean unthinking obedience. And it doesn't mean that we conform to gender stereotypes. It's not that, you know, the man has the checkbook and the woman has the cookbook.

Or the woman does the cooking while the man does the crossword. It doesn't mean that. What the Bible gives us here is a set of principles. And each of us who is married, we take those principles and we're to work them out in our own marriage about how they best apply to us as the particular husband and wife that we are. So what does it mean? Well, every Christian wife is called to submit to her own husband as her head in the same way as the church submits to Christ.

I wonder if that can help us work out a kind of a broader idea of what submission really means. So that it's not just that husbands and wives, they have the same roles, they're just the same.

[10 : 44] But when you have a big decision, if there's a tie, if you disagree, then you go with the husband. It means more than that. So when we think about the church submitting to Christ, what does that look like?

Well, here are some ideas of how the church submits to Christ. I hope you'll agree with them. The church, she looks to her head Christ for her beneficial rule.

So we let him lead us and we trust that his will is what's best for us. Another thing the church does in our submission to Christ is we seek to experience Christ's presence and love.

She responds, the church, to Christ with thankfulness and respect. And she seeks the glory of Christ by the way that she lives.

So if you think about how we live as Christians, as the church, we want people to praise Jesus by seeing the way that we live and hearing the things we say about him.

[11 : 50] So practically then, submission by the Christian wife includes letting and encouraging her husband to lead her. And that might include, especially if you're a competent, assertive person, it might well include holding back to give your husband the space so that he can lead.

When there's a discussion about a decision you're having to make that affects you both, the wife should be able to say, I think this, I think that. She should be free to say, I disagree with you about this.

But she should also say, ultimately, it's your decision. So that she accepts his decision, even when she thinks he's making the wrong decision.

Let him lead. It should be, as far as it can be, a respectful, joyful thing. In other words, not saying, you decide, but thinking inside, you're such an idiot.

But instead of having a gentle spirit and looking to rejoice in God's good design for marriage. That's what we're told about wives.

[13 : 11] Our second question then, what does the spirit-filled husband do? Well, what might we expect? If we never read this before and we got the bit about wives there, what might we expect to come next?

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands. Husbands, command. But instead, we get verse 25. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Husbands love their wives. And there are two dimensions to that in the verses. I've put them on the sheets. The first is a spiritual priority. The second is a practical provision.

So first of all, a spiritual priority. Look with me at verse 25 again. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 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, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In other words, love your wife in the same way and with the same priority with which Christ loved the church. So again, what doesn't that mean?

[14 : 34] It certainly doesn't mean being oppressive. It certainly doesn't mean being abusive. But it also doesn't mean submitting. Husbands don't submit to their wives.

See, verse 21, if you just look back up, was a headline for this section. It said, Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. But that word used there of submission is a word that the Bible uses for submission within authority relationships.

It's the word you would use of saying, Citizens, submit to your government or to your queen. Christians, submit to your church leader.

It's that kind of word. And now we're being told about the authority relationships in the household. Husband, wife, parent, child. So the wife submits to her husband.

The husband doesn't submit to his wife. So what does the husband do? Well, this is a radical redefinition of leadership. The husband uses his authority to love his wife with the same priorities as Christ loves the church.

[15 : 45] And that means the command to love your wife, husbands, is unconditional. You don't wait for your wife to earn your love. No, you commit to love her and to go on loving her.

Just picture Jesus on the cross. Where were his disciples as he died for them? They were deserting him. They were denying him. And yet he stayed.

He continued to lay down his life in love for them. Husbands, you go on loving your wife even if she stops loving you. It's also limitlessly sacrificial.

Jesus loved his church with everything he had to the point of being exposed to public shame, butchered on the cross, and abandoned by his heavenly father. So it's perhaps worth thinking, husbands, I don't know what it's costing you to love your wives today.

I don't know what you perhaps grumble about in your marriage. But the Lord calls you to love her in the same way that he loved us. And Jesus' priority in all of that was to make us holy in God's sight.

[16 : 52] So we could say that the love of a husband for his wife in a Christian marriage is this. It's taking the initiative for your wife's true good.

Make it your ambition, husband, that your wife is more and more becoming the person that God saved her to be. Growing in her faith. Growing in her love for God and for other people.

Growing in her hope of being with God in heaven. That's your priority for her in married life. So imagine you're facing a big decision. The husband or the wife has an exciting job offer, but it would mean moving as a family, uprooting to a new place.

You can't decide what to do. It's not obvious. Being a husband who is loving is about working out what would be best for your wife spiritually. To move or not to move.

You want her to grow in godliness. You might be the one taking the initiative to think, well, is there a good gospel church in the place that we would move to? Where we can serve and help out.

[17 : 59] And how would this new job impact on you as a married couple serving the Lord together? That's the big decisions. But also day-to-day and everyday ordinary decisions.

Take the initiative for your wife's true good. Now that doesn't mean saying things like, well, darling, it's the central prayer meeting this Wednesday. I think you should go to that because I prioritize your personal godliness.

I'll stay at home and watch the Champions League. That's not what it is. So that for some Christian husbands, the hymn, Take My Life and Let It Be, becomes Take My Wife and Let Me Be.

No, it doesn't mean that. Because husbands are called to be the spiritual leader. And leadership is about setting examples in godliness. It might mean things like the church weekend at home coming up in May.

That's a good opportunity for our Christian husbands to say to their families, Look, I know we had something else planned that weekend. Or look, I know on a Saturday we normally have sport and you go to the gym and this sort of thing.

[19 : 03] But let's cancel that that weekend. What we really need to do is hear some good Bible teaching together and we need to serve our church family on that weekend at home.

Let's do that together as a family. There's an opportunity. Husbands, could you cherish your wife's personal godliness? Husbands, could you think, I really wish that my wife was whatever you wish.

I really wish she looked more like Taylor Swift or that she let me go out more with my mates or I could trade her in for a younger model. Whatever you think about your wife in your worst moments.

Instead of that, could you think, What I love about my wife is that she wants her friends to come to know Jesus. What I love about her is that she's trying to share her faith with her friends.

I'm going to thank God for that every day and I'm going to pray for that to grow in her and I'm going to encourage that with everything I am. What I long for my wife is that she'd want to read her Bible every day.

[20 : 08] I would love that. Could we cherish our wife's personal godliness? Now Paul goes on after that priority with commands here for the husband.

There's the spiritual priority and then we're called to make practical provision for our wives. So have a look with me at verse 28. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church because we're members of his body.

I wonder if this deep down makes sense to us. In the mid-1990s, there was a terrible massacre in Port Arthur in Tasmania. 35 people were shot dead by a deranged man.

It was a horrible thing. Now when the Sydney Morning Herald reported on that tragedy, they wrote this. Jason Winter, 29 years old, a winemaker from New Zealand, working in Hobart, shot dead in a cafe after throwing himself in front of his wife and son to shield them.

[21 : 18] Dennis Levy, 50 years old, jewellery store owner on holiday with his wife who survived, shot in a cafe after pushing his wife under the table. Ron Jarry, 71, retired fruit grower from Red Clips, on holiday with his wife, shot in a cafe while trying to push his wife to safety.

Peter Nash, 32, painter and decorator from Latherton, Victoria, on holiday with his wife, shot dead while shielding his wife in the cafe. Raymond Sharp, 67, from Kilmore in Victoria, on holiday with members of golf club, shot in a cafe while protecting his wife.

Can you imagine if that was the other way around? Wouldn't be right, would it? Wives throwing themselves in front of their husbands. No, husbands, part of your spiritual leadership of your wife is we're the ones called to lay down our lives for them, whatever that takes.

But what lots of us husbands find hard is we can see the bigger picture, but we don't live it out every day. So I remember my friend Andy putting this so well for me.

He was saying how he used to think about things like, stories like that, the Sydney Morning Herald, and think, would I take a bullet for my wife? Of course I would. Of course I would. I'd take a bullet to save her.

[22 : 39] And then one night, they were in bed, and he just got cozy under the covers, and he was just dozing off to sleep. And his wife was pregnant, and she said to him, Andy, please will you just get me a glass of milk from the kitchen?

And his reaction was, can't you get it yourself? Do you see the irony there? That is the mindset of the modern Christian man.

Darling, I would take a bullet for you, but you can get your own milk. What would it look like to love your wife sacrificially in the day-to-day, serving her practically, being considerate of her in your sex lives, making time for her, listening attentively to her, taking an interest in her, praying for her?

So we've thought about the spirit-filled wife, and the spirit-filled husband. Thirdly, what does the spirit-filled marriage show? Well, Paul quotes from Genesis here, so he goes back to God's good design and how he made us, and he tells us that even then, God had something greater in mind for marriage.

Verse 31, just have a look, it's an extraordinary verse. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

[24 : 11] See what it's saying? That God, because he knew that man was going to sin and that he'd have to send the Lord Jesus to die for us, he created marriage so that he'd woven into the fabric of his good design for the world, a way of displaying the gospel to the world.

So that when a wife joyfully submits to her husband, and the husband, as the head of the marriage, sacrificially loves his wife, it is gospel reenactment.

We mirror the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church for the world to see. That's a beautiful thing. I remember a friend of mine, who she's very bright, she's very assertive, she's very successful, saying to me, she's a Christian woman, and she said to me, I cannot get my head round the Bible's teaching about husbands and wives until I see it in a Christian marriage.

But when you see it working, it is a beautiful thing. It displays the gospel. And let me just finish with three implications of that for us. First of all, don't make too little of marriage.

See, marriage is not just about two lonely people finding each other and getting together so that they feel a bit less lonely. It's not just about having a life companion.

[25 : 30] It's about God's purposes for the whole of humanity and his future for the whole cosmos being displayed in a relationship between two people. So that the way you love your spouse is to try and make them more like Jesus every day.

That's the glory of marriage. Don't make too little of marriage. Secondly, though, don't make too much of marriage. It's especially important if you're single and you long to be married or your marriage is a real struggle.

Verse 32 reminds us that ultimately, every marriage is just a temporary picture. It points us to something greater that we're all part of, that when Jesus comes in glory, he will come as the bridegroom and we, his church, will be his bride to be with him forever.

Marriage is just a picture of that, of what we're all preparing for. Don't make too much of it. And thirdly, from the picture, let's remember God's grace for our marriages.

Because we all fall short. And one of the things about married life is that it's very good at exposing your sin. There are things that you can hide from everyone else that you can't hide from your spouse.

[26 : 43] But let's not feel condemned by what we hear from God about how we should be as husbands and wives. Let's remember that when we see a really good marriage, or we think even of an ideal marriage, it's just a picture of how Jesus Christ has treated us.

That no matter how much you've failed as a husband or a wife, no matter how many times your relationships have broken down, that thanks to his love for us, giving himself for us, we're completely clean in God's sight.

Every day is a new start. We've been set free to serve Jesus, and serving him is perfect freedom, because there's no fear anymore. Let's pray together.

Let's have a moment of quiet to reflect on the Bible's teaching. Let's have a moment of quiet to reflect on the Bible's teaching. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Father God, this is indeed a profound mystery to us, but we thank you so much for the gift of marriage.

[28 : 03] We thank you for your good design, and we submit ourselves to your word as a good word for us. We pray for the marriages in our church family, and for the six couples getting married this year from our church family.

And we ask, Father, that your spirit will give our husbands and wives a deeper grasp of the love you've shown us in the Lord Jesus, that we would be empowered and transformed to serve our spouses in ways that honor you for the glory of your name.

Amen.