

Sermon – Marriage: Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16
Relationships Series Part One – Bruce Stanley
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*** On screen**

- "I love being married. It's so great to find one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life." (Rita Rudner)
- Martin Luther once said: *"Women have narrow shoulders and wide hips, therefore they ought to be domestic; their very physique is a sign from their Creator that he intended them to limit their activity to the home."*

Luther said that as a joke, you'll be glad to know! But the statistics on marriage are no joke. And every year there are more than 1.1 million weddings. On average, each of those 1.1 million marriages will last under 7 years. And 550,000 of them will end in divorce. That's 50%.

Oscar Wilde once said: "One should always be in love – this is the reason one should never marry."

We're in a crisis at the moment. Our world is turning towards an idea of marriage that hardly reflects *anything* God says in the Bible. Even among Christians there are an increasing number of gay marriages and open marriages, broken marriages and sex outside of marriage. Even among church leaders. That's why today it's more important than ever to be turning back to the Bible and reminding ourselves of how God intended marriage to be. And today, whether you're a husband, a wife, single, married, a widower, a mother, a father, a friend or a child, I would like us all to understand **not** just more about **marriage**, but to understand more about **God** and his relationship with us.

*** LEAVING AND CLEAVING**

So let's start by turning to Ephesians 5:31, where Paul quotes from the beginning: Genesis 2:24:

** "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh."*

This is what we call "**leaving and cleaving**". When a man and a woman come together in marriage, they LEAVE the household they once belonged to and BEGIN a new one. They become a NEW family unit, a NEW household.

In other words, a new couple need to separate from their old households. Two problems can happen here. Sometimes the parents find it hard to let their children *leave* when they get married. The role of a parent is to *support* their children as they establish a new household, but sometimes parents do more than support – they control. And that prevents a couple from cleaving together as they need to.

The second problem is when the one or both of the married couple finds it hard to *leave* their old household, sometimes even after 20 years. But as a husband and wife, you have a new household. And we're not talking about a physical household. Some people may still live with their parents after marriage. We're talking about establishing a new family unit **apart from** your old household. For example, I love my parents. I loved the household I grew up in. Not everyone has that joy. But regardless of how happy or sad your household was growing up, it's important to establish your **own** household together. Under God. To leave and cleave.

And once that new household is established, outside of the control of parents, the new one flesh relationship can continue to develop in the ways that Ephesians 5 talks about. And in this passage, Paul talks a lot about **Jesus**. Listen to the phrases he uses:

** as to the Lord... as Christ is the head of the church... as the church submits to Christ ... just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... just as Christ does the church ... This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Paul talks a lot about Jesus and his church because if you want to understand marriage, you need to understand Jesus' relationship to his church.

* SUBMISSION

First of all, as a church, **we submit to Christ** as our head and our saviour. Just like in marriage, we leave and cleave – when we made a commitment to Jesus, we **left** the world and **joined** ourselves to Christ. We became part of the family, the household, of Jesus Christ. And in that household, Jesus is the head. We submit to him. And that model, we're told, is to be reflected in marriage – the husband is the head of the new household. (Although he's not a saviour like Jesus!) The wife is called to submit to her husband as the head of the new household. And submit is a word often misinterpreted. Submit means to come under the authority of the husband – but two important things to note here: WHY and HOW...

1. WHY submit? For the sake of order in the relationship. The husband and wife have *different* roles, not *better or worse* roles. The words submission and headship are all about *order* in the household. Again, look at the example of Jesus. Jesus submits to his Father's will when he dies on the cross. "Not my will but yours be done", he says. Now, God the Father is not superior or better than God the Son. Yet there is submission between them for the sake of order. Jesus submits to the Father. The roles are different. Not better or worse. Different. Ordered.

2. HOW does a woman submit? In the original Greek, the word "submit" is in what's called a "*middle voice*". That basically means that the action is voluntary – in other words the woman chooses to submit for herself.

So we could say it like this:

* "Wives, choose for yourselves to submit to your husbands for the benefit of order in your household."

The wife is called to *choose* submission. But why would she? Because her husband is following the rest of what Paul says in these verses – he's taking on this responsibility out of complete love for his wife. Not just any old love. Love like Jesus showed.

* Verse 25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her". In other words, it's a headship of sacrificial love.

As verse 28 says, as one flesh, the husband cares for his wife as his own body, again following the example of Jesus. As his church, we are "the body of Christ" and Christ loves us like his own body. That's the way a husband is to love his wife.

* HEADSHIP

And the most important part of that love begins where Jesus' love for his church began – with Spiritual care. Husbands – how do we exercise godly headship? Pray for your wife. Ensure that she's able to be at church, in bible study. Make sure she has time for prayer, for reading her Bible, and fellowshiping with other women. Encourage her to develop and grow in her faith. That means a husband needs to sacrifice many things in his own life. A husband who comes home from work, eats dinner, watches the telly and goes to bed is not showing godly headship.

As Christians, we submit to Christ's headship because of the great love he's shown us in giving his life for us. We have no doubt Jesus loves us. We have no doubt he cares for us and wants what is best for us. And so we have no problem submitting to his headship. A Christian husband should leave his wife with no doubt that he loves her with that sort of sacrificial love.

Let me take some time to speak briefly about a specific issue that may affect some of us:

* What about a marriage where the husband is for some reason unable to fulfil his role, perhaps because he's mentally incapable or incapacitated, perhaps he's away at war, perhaps he's not a

Christian, perhaps he's abusive, ... what then? Well, have a look at 1 Corinthians 7 when you get home. It gives some good specific instruction for many situations.

But essentially, we need to remember that a Christian submits to the headship of the Lord Jesus first of all. Above all else, we are to follow God's headship and God's Word.

Now if a husband is for whatever reason unable to fulfil his headship role, then the Christian family, the church, has a responsibility to ensure that the wife is cared for when the husband is unable – you might say in the same way that the church is called to care for widows. The church cares for the wife by making sure she is still able to grow in her faith as much as possible under the circumstances.

One woman I knew had a husband who wasn't a Christian and he made it very difficult for her to be a Christian. He constantly found her Bibles and Christian books and threw them out and made her feel guilty every time she went to a church event, like she was neglecting her family. The church prayed for her, they made sure she always had access to a Bible, and worked Bible study times around her family commitments so her husband wouldn't think the church was dragging her away from her family. Eventually, her husband was so impressed by the church's way of dealing with him, that he gave in and decided to support her new faith. Even though he didn't become a Christian himself.

If you're in one of these situations, please talk more to me later. It's important that you're cared for in whatever way we can as a church.

* I want to finish today by talking about **what headship is not**. In the world, ***headship and responsibility*** mean power and control. But that's ***not*** the case in marriage. Sometimes, instead of taking responsibility, the husband takes control by saying things like: "I'm in control of ***everything***. I control the money. I decide what we spend it on. I make the decisions about our work and where we live." That is not headship. That's control. A husband and wife, remember, are equal in every way, including their roles in making financial decisions, educational decisions for their children, work decisions. Headship is not about making decisions. It's about leading the household in the decision process. You don't necessarily care for someone by making all their decisions for them.

And for the wife, this voluntary submission that we've talked about means *letting* your husband take responsibility. And even *helping* him to take responsibility when it's needed. Perhaps reminding him. Encouraging him. Remember, it's not about *control* or power. It's about having order in a household. It's about responsibility. Sacrifice. Love.

This last quote is a bit outdated socially, but the heart of it is good: again from Martin Luther:
"Wives, make your husband glad to cross his threshold at night. Husbands, make your wife sorry to have you leave."

That's the sort of headship we submit to as Christians under Jesus. A headship we love to come under. This passage teaches us about marriage, but it teaches us more, actually, about the great love that Jesus has for us as his bride. He is our perfect husband, who loved us to the point of dying on the cross. That is Godly headship. Sacrificial love. Let's pray.