

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God
Gospel-Shaped Relationships: Wives and Husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on May 1, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ **According to a Pew Report based on 2012 census figures, the share of American adults who have never been married is at an historic high.** One in five adults (20%) ages 25 and older have never married. Compare that to 1960, when that figure was only at 9%.
 - ▶ Now of course young adults (Millennials) are at the leading edge of this trend. Practically half of today's 25 to 34 year olds (49%) have never been married. Which is a fourfold increase since 1960 (12%). And that's just the national average. **If we zero in a little closer to home, to the greater Houston area, census data tells us that 53% of 25 to 34 year olds have never been married.**

- ❖ **One obvious explanation for this is the fact that more and more people are beginning their first marriage later in life.** The median age for first marriage is now 29 for men and 27 for women, up from 23 for men and 20 for woman back in 1960.
 - ▶ Now let's not be naive. **Just because 53% of young adults in our city have never been married – it doesn't mean they're all single.** Cohabitation between adults and raising children outside of marriage has also increased, so according to a March 2013 study, 24% of never-married Americans ages 25 to 34 currently live with a partner. So about a quarter are just living together.

- ❖ Okay, what's with all the statistics? What's the point? Yes marriage is in decline. Less people these days are married and less even want to get married. What are you getting at, pastor?
 - ▶ I'm not here to wag a finger at anyone. No, I'm here to point the church to an opportunity. To a unique mission for such a time as this. **In a marriage-stricken culture like ours, where more and more people are unfamiliar with marriage and what a healthy marriage looks like according to God's design, we need Christians to get married and stay married for the right reasons.** Where we're not just seeking companionship. Where we're not pursuing our own gratification, seeing marriage as an opportunity for personal growth and self-actualization.
 - **But rather where we get married and stay married for the sake of the gospel and our gospel mission.** That's the point I'm trying to drive home – that marriage is an institution that points to something greater than itself. That's what I hope you start to see.

- ❖ Now we've been going through the book of Ephesians, and we've come to what's called **the household codes**. Instructions for how believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, should walk. In this case, Paul focuses on three ordered relationships common to both 1st-century Rome and 21st-century America – the marriage, the family, and the workplace.
 - ▶ Now last week I spent some time looking at vv18-21, and I argued that you're going to misinterpret or misapply if you jump straight into v22 and read these household codes without their proper context. In the three realms of marriage, family, and the workplace, there are certain roles and responsibilities that require more than willpower for you to faithfully carry them out. **You'll need the Spirit of God to fill you and move you to obedience.**

- ❖ So I argued that before a husband and wife attempt to grapple with these commands and apply them to their marriage, they need to focus on v18 and the more fundamental command to be filled with the Spirit, to be under the influence of the Spirit, his controlling influence. **He's the very source of power in marriage.**
 - ▶ Your marriage will only achieve its God-intended potential – not by the power of your love for each other, not by working together hand-in-hand as a team – but by the power of the Spirit of God working in you and in your marriage.
 - I have three points this morning: 1) Marriage is a union of spiritual equals in complementary roles. 2) Marriage is a mystery revealed by our union with Christ. 3) Marriage is a theatre for the dramatization of the gospel.

A Union of Spiritual Equals in Complementary Roles

- ❖ Let's begin by trying to define marriage because these days you can't take that for granted. So let's make sure we're talking about the same thing. I want to first lay out the definition that Paul is arguing for, and then I'll show you where I get it from these verses.
 - ▶ **Paul understands marriage to be a covenantal union of a man and a woman who are spiritual equals yet who function in complementary roles.** As head of the wife, the husband bears the primary responsibility to lead their union to serve God and his gospel. And the wife is called to support and strengthen her husband's leadership as they partner together to serve God and his gospel.
 - This understanding is evident in vv22-23, "*22Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*"
- ❖ I realize I've raised a host of questions and possibly some hostility. **For some, it sounds very chauvinistic and patriarchal.** Only husbands are leaders? Wives are helpers? Maybe that worked in the past, but in the 21st-century we've moved beyond traditional gender roles. In fact, we're moving beyond gender duality. **Many today would consider gender itself to be fluid, so to argue for static gender roles in marriage seems completely outdated.**
- ❖ But based on the way Paul frames his argument, we can't just brush aside these verses as no longer applicable. Because notice how he grounds his understanding of marriage in the Old Testament. And not just anywhere in the OT but in Genesis 2:24.
 - ▶ He quotes that verse in v31, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" **It's because he grounds his view of marriage in Genesis 2 (in sinless created order), that I'm compelled to take Paul and his instructions to husbands and wives seriously.**
- ❖ **If he had grounded it simply in Greco-Roman culture, then we could easily brush aside anything he wrote that no longer fits our cultural values and norms.** Imagine if Paul had written something like, "Wives, don't pursue a career outside of the home because your pagan neighbors will consider it shameful and a sign of disrespect to your husband – so it might be a stumbling block and hurt your gospel witness."

- ▶ He didn't say that, but if he did that would be grounded in the cultural values and norms of his day. And of course we live in a different time and culture, where a wife pursuing a career would not lay a stumbling block for non-Christians. So a command like that – if it existed – would be considered no longer binding to all wives today.
- ❖ **I bring this up because that's the exact kind of argument being used to conclude that a husband's headship and a wife's submission (vv22-23) are no longer applicable or binding today.** That all made sense in Paul's day but not in ours. So we can set it aside.
- ▶ But the way Paul makes his case doesn't allow us to do that. **Because his definition of marriage is rooted in the original created order, in God's very good design.** I think what we need to do is to look at Genesis 1-2 to understand the foundation underneath Paul's view of marriage.
- ❖ So let's go back to the beginning – not just the beginning of your bible – but of the world. Let me read to you out of **Genesis 1:27**, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*”
- ▶ Each line drives home a theological point. **In line 1, it says we all come from God.** Yes, later in chapter 2 it says the woman was made from the man, but ultimately both sexes come from the hands of one Creator. **Now line 2 expands on that by teaching that we bear a resemblance to God.** We all bear the *imago dei*, the image of God.
 - **And line 3 makes it clear that both man and woman share in the *imago dei*.** Men do not bear more of a likeness to God than women. Just because the Bible uses the masculine pronoun in reference to God and reveals the first and second Person of the Trinity as Father and Son – that does not mean the Bible teaches that God is a man and not a woman. **God is *not* a man.** God created man. He created woman. And both share in his image. Therefore, both share the same value, dignity, and worth in God's eyes.
- ❖ **But even as Genesis 1 teaches male and female equality, Genesis 2 teaches the parallel truth of male headship.** Chapter 2 doesn't contradict chapter 1. Rather it expands and elaborates on Day 6 in chapter 1:24-31, specifically on how he made the first man and woman. And what we plainly see in the account of creation is that man is made first (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12-13), and the woman is made to function as the man's helper/helpmate.
- ▶ Let me read **Genesis 2:18**, “Then the LORD God said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.*” And in v20 it says, “*The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.*”
- ❖ **On one side, we see the wife's equality with her husband in that no other creature was fit for him.** Eve alone was Adam's equal. All the other animals are paraded before Adam, but none of them make the cut. But when God finally presents Eve, Adam says, "At last!" (Gen. 2:23) At last, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. At last an equal.

- ▶ **But at the same time, Eve is described as Adam's helper.** Adam is never called Eve's helper. So here we see the interplay of being equal in worth but different in roles. **They have complementary roles. Not competitive roles.** They're roles are different, but they work together for the same God-glorifying goal.

- ❖ And notice how all of this occurs before Genesis 3. Before sin enters the world. Before the curse. Some try to argue that a husband's headship is part of the curse imposed on Eve, and therefore, since in Christ the curse is gone, so should headship. It needs to go.
 - ▶ **But if the husband's role as head and the wife's role as helper is established pre-Fall, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 – then being a helper is not a curse.** It's not a punishment for women.

- ❖ But I know this is hard to accept. **We're conditioned to think the helper is inferior.** That leaders are inherently superior. So it sounds degrading to call a wife a helper.
 - ▶ But is this where our culture has fallen? Is this where we're at now? That we're assigning dignity and worth based – not on who you are – but what you do and how much authority you hold. *Why would you accept this worldview that essentially says people in positions of leadership and authority have greater dignity?* And the rest of us who submit to their leadership are inherently inferior. Do you actually believe that?

- ❖ This is why I love the biblical worldview. The Bible says to wives, “You're valuable. You have dignity and worth, not because of the role you hold or the amount of authority you have, but simply because you're made in the image of God.”
 - ▶ **And in Scripture, God has no problem identifying himself as a helper.** Listen to Psalm 54:4, “*Behold, God is my helper*”, or Psalm 118:7, “*The Lord is on my side as my helper*” (cf. Ps. 33:20; Ex. 18:4). If God is willing to refer to himself as our helper, we should be proud to be called the same.
 - And it's not as if God is redefining the term, trying to inject a new dignified meaning to the term *helper*. **No, by calling himself one, God is restoring the role of helper to its rightful position of dignity.** It's the world that devalues the helper and devalues women. The Bible actually offers the corrective.

- ❖ **Wives, your dignity in the eyes of God, is not based on what you do, on your role in marriage.** It's based on who you are – as one created in the image of God and (if you're a believer) as one redeemed for the image of Christ. That's where you find your worth.
 - ▶ **And husbands, do not boast in being the leader of your home.** Don't take pride in that. God assigned you that role – not because you're stronger than your wife or smarter than her (that's probably not the case anyways!). It's because that's God's good design. It's his way.

- ❖ **In fact, brothers, if you truly understand what God expects of you as the head of your wife and head of your home, it'll make you second guess if you're ready for marriage.** For taking on the heavy mantle of leadership.

- ▶ It's not a privilege. It's not a perk. Leadership is a responsibility. And according to our passage, it's a hard one. We're being called as husbands to love our wives, "*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (v25).

A Mystery Revealed by our Union with Christ

- ❖ This leads to our second point. What makes biblical leadership in the home such a heavy responsibility is the fact that marriage is grounded – not just in creation – but in redemption. **Paul explains that marriage is a mystery revealed by the Church's union with Christ.**
 - ▶ You see, for thousands of years, God's people took Genesis 2:24 seriously and practiced marriage. In fact, marriage was practiced in every culture, in every time and place. But its true meaning remained a mystery.
 - But after the Son of God came into our world, after he lived, died, and rose again. The picture became much clearer. After quoting Genesis 2:24 and emphasizing the one-flesh nature of marriage ("*the two shall become one flesh*"), Paul says in v32, "*This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*"
- ❖ He's talking about this mysterious union that occurs when a man and a woman take their vows before God and witnesses. When I officiate weddings, I tell couples that it's at that moment something miraculous happens. **They suddenly go from two separate individuals to one unified flesh.** It's crazy if you think about it. I still see two people in front of me. But if what the Bible says is true (and it is), then there's actually only one person in front of me. That's how deep and personal the marriage union goes. I know it's hard to comprehend.
 - ▶ Paul agrees. **This reality of becoming one flesh with your spouse is so profound that Paul says it only makes sense when you see it in light of our union with Christ in the gospel.** Marriage isn't something that just so happens to relate to the gospel. They don't just happen to have a lot of similarities.
- ❖ Paul goes further. He says that God, from before the foundation of the world, had a plan to redeem sinners by uniting them with Christ. **And so he purposely designed marriage as a way to illustrate this profound gospel truth.**
 - ▶ In other words, marriage is modeled after the gospel (not the other way around). That's why it says wives are to submit to their husbands "*as the church submits to Christ*" (v24) and husbands are to love their wives "*as Christ loved the church*" (v25).
- ❖ You have to realize that no one spoke like this in Paul's day. It would not have been strange to tell husbands to rule their households well. But Paul is telling husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. That would've been unheard of!
 - ▶ And how does Christ love his church? By giving himself up for her. The way Paul puts that is significant. He doesn't just say Christ died for the church. He says Christ "*gave himself up*" for her. That signifies a self-willingness. **That says Christ took the initiative to give himself up in death for the sake of his Bride, the Church.**

- ❖ **It was a willing love for the Church that motivated God**, before the foundation of the world, to choose a people in Christ, to save and not to condemn (Eph. 1:4). **It was a willing love for the Church that moved the Father** to send His Son into this darkened and fallen world. **It was a willing love for his Bride that propelled Christ** in his earthy life to endure the mocking and rejection from his own. **It was out of a willing love for his people**, that led Christ to endure the cross and despise its shame.

- ❖ **Husbands, are you willing to give yourself up for your wife?** To love her with a sacrificial love? To die for her? I think most of us would say yes. You've gone through the scenario in your head of what you'd do if a car were to careen towards your wife or a gunman were to pull the trigger. Without a second thought you'd push her out of the way. You'd die for Riley!
 - ▶ **But what about dying to yourself?** What about dying to your ego and admitting to her that you were wrong? We'd so easily lay down our lives for our wives, but we hold on so tight to our own pride, our own rights, our own interests. **But giving those things up to love her well is what it means to love as Christ loved the church.**

- ❖ **In v26, Paul goes on to describe – not just how Christ loved us in the past – but how he loves us in the present by continually sanctifying us with his Word.** This ongoing process began at our conversion when we were cleansed by the washing of water with the Word – the Word of forgiveness of our sins found in the gospel. And the sanctifying continues as the gospel is preached daily into our lives through the written or spoken Word of God.
 - ▶ And to what end? Look at v27, "*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.*" **Christ loved us in the past. He loves us in the present. And he will love us into the future.** Until that glorious day, that Wedding Day, when we'll experience the fullness of our salvation, the consummation of our union with Christ.

- ❖ Did you notice how – unlike in earthly weddings – in this one, the Bride doesn't make herself presentable? It's the Groom who does all the work. **He prepares his own Bride in a dress of splendor, one without any blemish, and presents her to himself to be wed.** His love and headship have one goal – for her to grow into mature beauty and splendor.
 - ▶ The Church's head is the Church's Bridegroom. **His headship is not intended to crush us or suppress us but to help us achieve our fullest potential in his image.**
 - In the same way, when husbands exercise headship, it's not to crush or control their wives. It's not to suppress or hold them back. **Brothers, we're to exercise headship over our wives with the goal of helping them grow and develop into their fullest potential in the image of Christ.**

- ❖ Paul goes in vv28-30 to tell husbands to love your wife as your own body. Let me read v28, "*In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*" Paul's obviously appealing to Jesus' teaching on the 2nd greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

- ❖ But since Paul sees marriage as a one-flesh union between a man and his wife, he goes even further than the 2nd greatest commandment. **Loving your wife is not just a matter of loving someone else just like your love yourself. It is to love yourself.** She's you. And you're her. That's how deep your union is. So to hate your wife, to hurt your wife, to crush her spirit – is to hate yourself, to hurt yourself, to crush yourself.
- ❖ **And on the flip side, to love your wife is to love yourself.** Now you might think that sounds a bit self-serving – but is it? How can this be selfish love if this is how Jesus loves the Church – if he loves as a matter of loving his own body? Keep reading in v29, “²⁹*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ³⁰*because we are members of his body.*”
 - ▶ That word for *nourish* has to do with rearing and raising children (cf. Eph. 6:4, “*bring them up*”). And that word for *cherish* is used elsewhere by Paul in reference to a nursing mother caring for her infant child (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7).
 - Now a husband's nourishing and cherishing love for his wife is not meant to be patronizing. We're not treating our wives as children. **Rather the emphasis is on showing her sweet and tender love.** Paul says, “*just as Christ does the church*”. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, treating it as his own body because it is. This is how Christ leads and loves us.
- ❖ Think about it. Maybe some of us husbands have a hard time knowing how to lead and love our wives with tenderness because we're unfamiliar with that kind of leadership and love coming from Christ himself.
 - ▶ **For many of us, we still relate to Jesus as you would a hard taskmaster.** We chafe at his commands. They feel burdensome, like a heavy yoke. **If that's how you experience Jesus' leadership over you, that'll probably color the way you lead your wife.** I wouldn't be surprised if you're harsh in the home, if your leadership comes off as heavy-handed.
- ❖ If you want to be a tender leader to your wife, then, yes, you'll need to work on your temper, your patience, your attitude, your tone of voice, etc. **But first focus on your relationship with Jesus.** We want quick solutions to iron out the rough patches in our marriages.
 - ▶ But what's going to make the difference in the long run is working on your relationship with Christ every single day. Every day in his Word. Every day asking for a heart to receive his authority as an easy yoke. **Until his leadership feels sweet and tender to you – only then will your leadership at home carry the same flavor.**

A Theatre for the Dramatization of the Gospel

- ❖ Let me conclude quickly with my final point. If our marriages are modeled after our union with Christ, if they were intended, from the beginning, to refer to Christ and the Church – **then the obvious conclusion is that your marriage is ultimately not about you and your spouse.** It's not about your love for each other and your commitment to each other.

- ❖ No, it's about Christ and his love for his Bride. It's about his never-ending, unbroken commitment to us, his Church. Your marriage is but a shadow. Christ and the Church is the reality. **This is why I often tell couples on their wedding day to see their new marriage as a theater for the dramatization of the gospel.**
 - ▶ I exhort them to treat their marriages like a public stage on which the drama of the gospel can be acted out every day. **The husband is cast in the Christ role; the wife in the Church role.** And together they display the gospel through the way they love, the way they fight, the way they reconcile, the way they parent, the way they steward their resources, and in the way they live to bless others with the blessings they've received from God.
 - **Marriage is your theater, and through it, you have a unique and powerful way to share the gospel, to point people to the love of Christ for sinners like us.** Maybe you didn't go into marriage with that in mind, but now here's your chance. It doesn't matter how many years you've been married. **You haven't experienced marriage to its fullest until you're doing this – until you're using it to live out the gospel for the glory of God.**

- ❖ Now I've been speaking to married folk this whole time, so as I close, **I want to speak to those of you who aren't married.** I don't want you to walk away with the impression that you can only really glorify God and his gospel by getting married. In fact I hope you walk away thinking, "Wait, is that all marriage is ultimately for – to live out the gospel, to point people to the love of Christ for his Church? But I'm already doing!"
 - ▶ Exactly. You're not missing out. **When it comes to the abundant life Jesus promised, you're already living it if you're living for the gospel.** Marriage is not going to give you abundant life. Only Jesus will. So if you're already in Christ, then you already have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
 - **So don't go chasing after marriage thinking you need it to live a full and abundant life.** No, go and live that life now by living for the gospel, and if God gives you someone to do it with – then great, get married. But otherwise you're fine. To live is *not* to be married. To live is Christ.