

Well, we are now going to finish up this section on marriage and how it intertwines with the gospel. For those of you who have been availing yourself of the Sunday School class taught by the elders, there has been a lot of focus on what God has to say on the marriage relationship. We have been hitting it from all sides. And you know with everything going on in the world right now, it could really be easy to ask the question, is this really the best use of our time, is this the best thing we could be focusing on and thinking through when so much is happening and there is so much uncertainty and confusion. And I believe it is for multiple reasons:

One, for as we saw last week, to understand marriage rightly is to shed light upon the gospel and where everything is heading, all of redemption and all of creation. And so, because of that, we can all take comfort in the doctrine of marriage because all of us who are in Christ are in a marriage-like covenant with the Lord of glory that will last for all of eternity. Second reason, we are here, in this section of God's Word by the providence of God. Because it is His word that drives our worship and guides our lives, we will continue to focus upon the full counsel of His word week after week. As times grow darker, the need for this only increases because His Word is the lamp unto our feet and light unto our path in a very dark world.

And third and more practically, the truth is, we don't know where all of this is heading in the very near future. We know where it will ultimately wind up, but there is a lot of unknown between now and then. The world has been spinning out of control for a while now and it seems to only be getting worse. We may very well have some extremely difficult days ahead of us and I will say this, you do not want to enter those days with a war going on in your home. In your marriage.

I don't know if this has been your experience, but it certainly has been mine. When things are not right in the home, it is hard to face anything else. I have passed through a lot of trials in my life, but without question the most crippling have been those seasons, especially early on in our marriage, when things have not been right between me and my wife. It is in those seasons that everything carried with a sense of overwhelm or despair. On the other hand, when there is strength in the home and things are functioning according to God's design, the trials out there, no matter how big, seem manageable and are at least faceable. But when there are big trials on the outside and trials on the inside of the home. Those are dark seasons to pass through.

I say all that to say, maybe God has you focusing on this right now, to help prepare you for things to come. If there are things you and your spouse need to work on, I would encourage you to work on them now. Don't put it off. Walk in forgiveness towards one another. Repent where you need to. Bring in help when needed. But don't continue on piling the offenses, digging the hole deeper and conducting your role contrary to what God has said and contrary to the gospel. Lay down your pride. Be humble towards one another. You are going to need each other. You need each other now. And you are going to need each other in the days ahead. Fight for your marriage. Fight for obedience and health in the home.

So, with all that being said, we are going to look one more week at the husband's love for his wife and how that is reflected in the gospel. In Christ's love for the church. Last week we looked at the first part of Paul's address to the husbands in verses 25-27, in which he described the love that is based upon sacrifice; specifically, the sacrifice of Christ and His love for the church. This week Paul continues in verses 28 - 33, to exhort husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. But the basis of his

exhortation shifts from focusing on sacrifice to focusing on the union of this relationship and the implications drawn out of there.

So, as we look at this today, we are going to see two aspects of the union of the marital relationship: first we will look at the practical implications; and second, we will look at the theological grounding. My hope for us today is that we would see the significance of the marriage relationship and ultimate purpose in its creation, and that would spur us on in our faithfulness toward our spouses and to God. I think it is easy to lose sight, especially in a culture that treats marriage as so disposable, of how grand and glorious this relationship truly is. In fact, as we will see, there are eternal wonders revealed in the marriage relationship. If we are going to honor marriage as it should be honored, we must understand it.

So, let's look at this, starting with the practical implications of marital union. Look at verse 28: "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." When Paul says, "in the same way," he is playing off of what he said in the prior verses—what we went through last week. Namely this goes back to what he opened with in verse 25, that we are to love as Christ loved the church. It is quite clear that the thing that Paul is emphasizing throughout this text over and over is that a husband's love is to be reflective of Christ's love.

This is non-negotiable. In fact, when he says "should" here (In the same way husbands should love their wives), this is a strong word that has the implications of a moral obligation. So again, this is not just a good idea. Do not think Paul is just giving marriage tips here. He is not explaining to us how to get the most out of our marriage relationships. The Spirit of God working through the Apostle is laying down a moral obligation that is upon all husbands. In other words, to neglect to obey what is being said in this passage is sin. We don't get to make this up. We don't get to decide what is best for our marriage relationships. This is the design and the command of God, and it is a moral obligation to which we must give ourselves to.

And just as an aside, there is a very popular movement right now even among so-called conservative reformed types, that uses very smooth language to try to flatten the moral imperatives and obligations of Scripture. In fact, just a couple of months ago a well-known Gospel coalition pastor sent out a tweet to pastors asking them to refrain from using any language of "should" or "ought" in their preaching in the coming year. And rather, he encouraged pastors to replace that with encouragement that people "can" obey rather than they "should" obey. That sounds nice, but the problem is that it is not biblical. Christianity is not summed up in "believe in Jesus and be encouraged." You would have to change the Bible in passages like this in order to take that man's counsel. Don't buy into that. And it is everywhere, from authors that are very popular. It is usually just more subtle than that.

The truth is, Jesus Christ is Lord. And we must seek to obey all that he has commanded. He is the head of the church, and we are to submit ourselves to His Word. And here he has placed a moral obligation upon husbands to love their wives. Husbands should, ought to love their wives.

But take notice how we are to love them in this passage. He says, "as their own bodies." Now those of you who know your Bibles might be thinking that prescription is not all that unique. I mean didn't Leviticus 19 command us to Love our neighbor as ourselves? Yes. Absolutely. Jesus says that is the second greatest commandment and it is repeated over and over throughout the new testament. We are to love others as ourselves. In fact, Paul says in Galatians that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus fleshed this out in a little different way in the sermon on the

mount when he issued what has been called the Golden Rule. He said, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

So, without question there is a familiarity to this command. And in that, in life, our nearest and dearest neighbor will always be our spouses. For husbands, it will be our wives. But it goes beyond that. There is a uniqueness to this command too. Because it is taken further than even what we see in the second great commandment. We are not told that we are to love our neighbor, generally, as our own bodies. That is reserved for our wives alone. In fact, at the end of verse 28 Paul goes so far as to say that to love your wife is to love yourself. Certainly, that cannot be said about any neighbor in general.

But the idea here is that the amount of care that we issue towards our own bodies, we are to issue towards our wives. You know we don't really stop and think about it because it is just second nature to us, but we all spend a lot of time caring for our own bodies. When the body needs a breath, we give it air, when the body needs hydration, we give it water, when the body needs energy we give it food, when the body needs rest, we give it rest. We all care for the needs of our bodies every day. If we didn't, eventually we would cease to live. This is exactly the point he is making. Look what he says in verse 29: "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church..." Paul gives us a general principle here for how people act toward their own bodies. It is not with hatred. But it is with disciplined care. And we as husbands are to issue the same type of care towards our wives.

Why? Because, as we will see from Genesis here in a minute, the husband and wife are one flesh. There is no human relationship in the world like this one. Your wife is indeed your nearest and dearest neighbor, but she is much more than that. Husbands and wives are united as a single entity. The bonds of the marriage covenant take two individuals and make them one. It is for this reason that Paul can say what he is saying. To love your wife is literally to love yourself because you are united as one. If you were to neglect your own physical body, it would be to your destruction. If you don't feed the body, if you don't tend to the body's needs, you don't care for the body, eventually you will pay for it. It is a form of self-hatred. Well, the same is true for your wife. If you don't tend to her needs as you would tend to your own, not only are you hating her, but you are hating yourself because you two are bound together as one.

That is why Paul uses these two descriptor verbs here. To show us the type of care that ought to be issued to our wives. He says, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it..." The word nourish has in it the idea of providing for ones needs. Literally it means providing food. But I think it is being used broader than that, husbands are to provide for the needs of their wives. Biblically speaking, it is the responsibility of the husband to provide for his wife and for his family. God has designed him specifically to put his hand to the plow and work. And part of the purpose of his work is so that he can make provision for his home, for those whom God has entrusted to his care.

In fact, Scripture has an extremely low view of those who refuse to make provision for the needs of their family. First Timothy 5:8 says, if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." I was talking to a brother about this passage a couple of weeks of weeks ago, and he made the comment, "Think about the severity of this statement. Theologically speaking, what is worse than an unbeliever? One who denies the God who made them. What's worse than that?" Well from this text we can say for sure, that one who claims to know the truth but refuses to provide for his own household would qualify as one who is worse than an unbeliever. Why? Because God has entrusted the care and responsibility of the household to the husbands and fathers. It is a stewardship from God.

Now just a footnote for clarity, that is not talking about someone who is struggling to make ends meet or is in between jobs. Or that kind of thing. Not at all. It is talking about those who are lazy and refuse work or those who do work but spend all their money on themselves or their own interest rather than providing for their wife and children. No, we are to work as men and we are to provide for our homes, for our wives.

But more than just food and finances, husbands are also to provide security and protection for their wives—the security and protection that a wife needs. Husbands are the protectors of their home. By God's design, wives are the weaker vessel according to first Peter three, and husbands are to protect that. They are not created for conquering and defending as men are. Men are to use their God-given strength and courage to protect and provide safety for their wife. It is simply written into creation that men are the providers and protectors of their homes. To function in such a way is to imitate Christ. As Paul says, "just as Christ does the church."

Well, how did Christ, how is he the provider and protector for the church? What did that look like? When Christ laid down his life on the cross, it was both an act of provision and protection for His Bride. For the church. It was protection in that He protected us from the wrath of God that we deserved. The wrath of almighty God was bearing down upon us, being justly poured out upon us because of our sin against Him. But our great King stepped in between that wrath and us and took it upon Himself. He bore the penalty for our sin and thus protected us from what we deserved.

And it was provision in that he provided us with His righteousness. Jesus Christ lived out perfect righteousness fulfilling the law on our behalf. Doing what we could not do. And on the cross, He imputed His righteousness to us, to His bride, and he provided us with His righteous standing before God. This was the great exchange. Our sin was imputed to Him, and His righteousness was imputed to us. Redemption came through the bridegroom's provision and His protection of the bride. Husbands, you are to do likewise. You are to nourish your wife through your provision and protection of her.

But lest we think that is the summation of the husband's duty, Paul uses another word here. Cherish. Husbands are to cherish their wives. This word has in it the connotation of tenderness and warmth. In fact, it is used in First Thessalonians to speak of the tenderness with which a mother cares for her child. A husband's responsibility goes beyond mere physical duties. He cannot at the end of his life say, "Well, I've put food on the table and I've protected my family, I have done my job." No, those things must be done, but they must be done in the context of cherishing your wife. You are to treat her with tenderness, with gentleness, with kindness.

First Peter three says that you are to live with her in an understanding manner. That means that you are to have to understand that God has wired her differently. She thinks through things differently. She processes things differently. Her emotions are different. Her desires are different. Not wrong. Just different. By God's good design and for His good purposes. And husbands are commanded to be understanding about that. To Cherish her for who she is. Not to try to get her to think and function like you do.

And in that, husbands are never to be harsh with their wives. You cannot cherish her, you cannot be tender towards her, if you are being harsh with her. In fact, that was Paul's main prohibition in the parallel text from Colossians, Colossians 3:19. He says, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." You're not to use your strength for harshness, but tenderness. You are to be gentle. Your

wife is not your bro or your buddy. She is a treasure given to you by almighty God Himself. She is to be treated differently than all others. She is to be cherished.

And the beautiful thing about that is this is how Christ treats us. Look again at what he says: "...just as Christ does the church," and then verse 30, "because we are members of his body." Paul shifts the pronoun there to the first-person plural—we. We are members of His body. He is making sure that everyone understands that if you are in Christ, you are a member of the body of Christ. That is not just a vague term for the church. That is a term that speaks of the union between Christ and the church. Christ as the head and the church as His body.

And as His body we are cherished by Christ. If you have ever thought you are just tolerated by Christ, you are wrong. Christ loves His own and he cherishes His people. *"Yeah, but you don't know how weak I am and how much I have to struggle against sin."* Yes, I do. That's true for all of us. But listen to what the Scripture says about Christ's demeanor to our weakness, in Hebrews 4: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

If you are His, Jesus' demeanor towards you is one of sympathy, and mercy, and grace. When you fail, He doesn't stiff arm you. He beckons you to come near to receive grace in your time of need. In fact, that was His gospel call in Matthew 11: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. That's how Jesus describes Himself towards those who come to Him; the same Jesus that is coming back on a white horse, with eyes like flaming fire, and a rod of iron in His hand with which to conquer and judge the nations is the same Jesus that speaks a tender word to His people, and says come to me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

Husbands, you are to have that same seeming dichotomy in your life. You are to put your hand to the plow and work as a man, conquering whatever God has placed before you, but then you are to go home and speak a tender word to your wife. As you cherish her in the same way that Christ cherishes the church. That is your role, brother. And all of this arise from God's design for marriage. Which is what Paul brings out next.

So, those were the practical implications of our union but let's look at the theological foundation for all of this. Verse 31 says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a direct quote from the creation narrative in Genesis chapter two. Paul brings this out and goes back to the very beginning of all things in order to demonstrate that everything he has been saying has been based upon God's creation and design of man and woman and the institution of marriage.

You know, it is not uncommon to hear or read others refer to this section of Ephesians five as being a description of "Christian marriage." And that's true in a sense but referring to it in that way could veil an important truth here, because this isn't merely Christian marriage. This is marriage. All marriages are designed by God to function in this way. The Christian aspect, the effect of the gospel, is a restoration of the original design. In other words, Christianity did not change the design and function of marriage. It simply revealed it with more clarity and restored it. But all marriages, whether among pagans or Christians, are designed to function like this. Because God created it that way from the very beginning.

Man is meant to leave behind the authority and the household in which he was raised. Mother and father are no longer his closest family. He leaves the paternal order of his father's household in order to form a new one by the joining himself together to his wife. When the ESV says "hold fast," the word means to join or to unite. To cleave to. The word was used to speak of the joining and mixing of alloys, of metals. Once mixed and joined together they could not be separated. And one's separation from prior family is necessary in order for this uniting to take place.

When this happens, the Scripture says the two become one flesh. That is what marriage is—a one flesh union between one man and one woman. And the idea of the one flesh union is both a spiritual reality and a physical experience. But the two individuals really do become one entity. A married couple. Marital intimacy then is a physical expression of that spiritual reality. The truth is when two people come together and get married, they are not ultimately married because the preacher declares them to be so or because the state recognizes it to be so. No, they are married because in the exchanging of their covenantal vows to one another, God is present to unite these two individuals into one. It is God who joins them together, which is why Jesus Strictly warned, "What God has joined together, let no one separate."

Your marriage is a work of God, and it is to be honored as such. In fact, the writer of Hebrews says that the institution of marriage is to be held in honor by all in Hebrews 13:4. You are not only to honor your marriage, you are to honor marriage. You are not only to guard your marriage, you are to guard one another in each other's marriages. We are all to be very careful that we never say nor do anything that could cause division in another marriage. To do so is to work against the work of God. But rather we are to encourage one another towards faithfulness in the marriage covenant. It is to be held in honor by all. And the deepest reason for that is what Paul says next.

Look at verse 32: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Paul just took a turn there that no one expected. I can guarantee that his original audience did not see this coming. He looks back at the creation of marriage in the Garden and says from the very beginning, this was a reference to Christ and the church. No one saw that. Fittingly, he again uses the language of mystery. We have seen this before, both in chapter one and in chapter three. And we will see it again in chapter six where he makes it really clear. In 6:19 he makes it really clear what is being referenced, when he said, "pray for me that I might open my mouth boldly to proclaim the **mystery** of the Gospel."

This mystery language is always a reference to something that was concealed in times past, but through the gospel has been revealed in Christ. And what has been revealed in Christ with regards to marriage is that the entire purpose of marriage is point us to the gospel. The relationship between Christ and the church. This answers the question of why Paul has been using that as a model for marriage. Haven't you ever stopped to ask why is he doing that? I mean sure it is a really beautiful that he is using Christ and the church as a model for marriage, but why? Why is it a model for marriage? The answer is this: From the very beginning, marriage was created as a type. It was created as a foreshadow of things to come. It was an earthly representative of a heavenly reality.

The everlasting and eternal covenant between Christ and the church is the fulfillment. Marriage is the type - The covenant between Christ and the church, the new covenant is the antitype. Marriage is the shadow; the new covenant is substance. Marriage is the earthly representative; the everlasting covenant is the heavenly reality. That is why it serves as a model of marriage. Because it is the ultimate point of marriage - to show us a glimpse of the nature of the relationship between Christ and His people. This is why God created it.

The reality is, Christ has joined himself together with the church. We, as his people, are in union with Christ, never to be separated. We have been united to Him. And it is because of our union with Christ that all of the redemptive benefits of Christ have been credited to us. Just as we are coheirs with our wives in the grace of life, everything we have is ours together, so it is with Christ. Because of union with Christ, we are co-heirs with Him throughout eternity. The inheritance that the Father has bestowed upon the Son, we are partakers in. As Romans eight says, we are co-heirs with Christ. He has brought us into His reward. And one day the shadows of earthly marriage will give way to the substance. This is why marriage is a temporary institution. We will not be married to our spouses in glory. Now for some of you that might be hard to hear, others of you just breathed a sigh of relief. But marriage is a temporary institution. As Jesus said, "In the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Matthew 22:30)."

But do not think that there is loss there. There is not. The beauty of marriage will give way to something that is infinitely greater, as it finds its purpose and fulfillment in Christ. Very soon we will all find ourselves at the marriage supper of the Lamb. At the start of eternity in which God has said is for the purpose of displaying the immeasurable riches of His grace to those who are in Christ. To us. Brothers and sisters, we cannot fathom, nor even imagine what is in store for us because Christ has brought us in as His own; because He has pledged His covenant faithfulness to us and united Himself to us. And He will never be unfaithful to that. He will never leave nor forsake you. The covenant between Christ and the church is an eternal covenant. And that covenant is the model for our marital covenants. By the grace of God, we want our marriages to reflect that. Which is why Paul finishes the way he does.

Paul concludes this entire section with a summary statement to both husbands and wives and how we are to treat one another. Look at what he says in verse 33: "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." As you live that out, you will be showing forth God's plan of redemption to a lost and dying world. I want to finish our time a little different today. I want to finish by issuing husbands and wives with a charge. There are several couples in this room who have already received this charge because this is what I issue in every wedding I oversee. But I want to put these things before all of us. I will start with the wives and finish with the husbands

Wives, I charge you in the presence of God and the presence of the church, to conduct your role as a wife in a manner that is worthy of the gospel that you proclaim. Just as the Church submits to Christ, you are to submit in everything to your husband. You are to be his helper. To follow him. Respect him. Support him. Encourage him. Strengthen him. Place his needs above your own. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ in the following of your husband.

Husbands, I charge you in the presence of God and the presence of the church, to play the man. This is your role, brother. Play the man. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Protect her. Provide for her. Cherish her. Nourish her. Honor her. Lead her in the path of righteousness. Live with her in an understanding manner. Place her needs above your own. Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Christ, and love your wife. May we all take up and live out these charges for the display of gospel and the glory of God. I will pray and then we will enter into a time of prayer and reflection.