

## ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son

Part Eleven - Sunday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1890

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### Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Define Authentic Marriage And Infuse It With Its Deepest Spiritual Power

**Ephesians 5:22-33** - "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [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. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. [25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] 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. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [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. [31] "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. [33] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

I can still remember the day I finally decided we needed to rewrite the marriage ceremony used for church weddings at Cedarview. I was experiencing growing amazement (and frustration) with the fact that people were actually requesting we **not** read Paul's words regarding marriage - by far the most extensive treatment in terms of the actual **behavior** of husbands and wives to each other in the New Testament - at their wedding.

As I read over the marriage ceremony we had used for many years at the church I was struck by the fact that most, if not **all**, of the passages cited dealt with the subject of **love** in general, and almost **none** dealt with marriage in particular. So Christian couples would join together around the soaring strains of First Corinthians 13 rather than the practical reminders from Ephesians 5.

And usually, when push came to shove, couples refrained from having Paul's words read because they resented Paul's words about the wife "**reverencing**" her husband - or "**submitting**" to him - depending on the translation being used at the time. Almost always, however, that kind of **allergic reaction** to Paul's words came from a shabby understanding of Paul's words - frequently the result of poor teaching - or worse - no teaching at all.

The truth is, these words **must** be proclaimed at every truly Christian wedding, but never as a **tool** for manipulation or coercion of another's will. Rather, these words must be proclaimed - and once properly understood - **embraced** by husbands and wives alike because Paul links these words on **marriage** with words about the relationship between **Christ and the church**.

This is Paul's whole point in Ephesians 5:22-33. The husband/wife relationship is congruous with the Christ/church relationship. The one relationship is a picture of the other. **You can no more create your own rules for marriage than you can for your relationship with Jesus.**

And so, if you're going to be married in Cedarview you must use the church marriage ceremony. You can add things to it - songs, quotations, candle lightings, remarks, etc. - but you can't **delete** any of the Scripture texts. We came to this decision not only because it is **right** that God's Word be heard on **marriage** (not just **love**) when people get married in this church, but because marriage will only be a truly **fulfilling** and, yes, **liberating** experience when **both** partners enter into it on God's terms - not their own.

We're going to focus today on the husband's responsibilities toward the wife. This is **not** because I don't think the wife needs to take her responsibilities to her husband seriously. I do. I stand by Paul's words about the wife submitting to her own husband.

I have never been impressed with the way people try to use Paul's words about "**submitting to one another**" in **verse 21** to **cancel out** his specific instructions about "**wives submitting to their husbands**" in **verse 22**. If you make Paul's words about mutual submission a **blanket** summary of the rest of the chapter you end up with Paul telling **parents** to submit to their **children**. It is a much better handling of the text to take Paul's words in verse 21 to mean there are **patterns of submission** that must be manifested in the body of Christ if it is to properly mirror the relationship Christ has with His Church. Then Paul says here are some examples - wives to husbands, children to parents, etc.

My main concern in this morning's teaching is that Paul's words about the husband/wife relationship don't get used to somehow

**hammer out** a kind of authoritarian stance by some small-minded husband. Rather, I believe the commanded cross-styled love of the husband is the **initiating factor** for living with a submissive wife. And I honestly don't think **any** wife will resent Paul's words about **her** responsibility in the marriage relationship when the husband properly exercises **his** - **Ephesians 5:25** - "**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....**"

The truth is simple. Brother, you will never **make** your wife submissive to you by your **authority**. That is why Paul never addresses his words about the wife being submissive to her husband to anyone but the **wife**. This is very important. Paul never tells the **husband** to **exercise** his authority over the wife. He has instructions for the husband, but exercising his authority isn't one of them. He only tells the husband to **love his wife** as Christ loved the church.

The husband **frees** his wife to be submissive by truly manifesting the **self-crucifying love of Jesus** toward her. That's what this teaching is all about. Jesus died on the cross to **define marriage** and to **infuse it with His own spiritual power**. But those two things will only come about as **all** of God's Word is allowed to have its voice heard.

1) **NONE OF WHAT I HAVE SAID WILL SEEM IMPORTANT UNTIL WE UNDERSTAND THE "MYSTERY" PAUL DESCRIBES ABOUT MARRIAGE IN 5:32**

Let's look at these words in their context:

**Ephesians 5:31-32** - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." [32] **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."**

The words of verse 31 clearly describe God's creative will for permanent heterosexual unions in marriage. But there is something else in these verses that is frequently missed by many Christians. Verse 31 is a direct quote from **Genesis 2:24**. These are God's words spoken to Adam and Eve **before** they ever come together in union.

Then, in verse 32 Paul tells us the marriage relationship was always **designed** to reflect the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the church. Of course, Christ wasn't physically on the earthly scene when Adam and Eve were created. This **"mystery"** of the meaning of marriage wasn't fully revealed at the time of creation. In fact, Paul describes something that was only fully revealed when Jesus Christ came to redeem His **bride**, the church, through His death on the cross.

Ponder this. Paul talks about the creation of the very first couple on earth and Christ and His church in the very same breath. **Why?** Paul tells us something that none of us would have known, and none of us would have even imagined just looking at the marriage relation itself. Marriage, says Paul, was intended, right from the creation of the very first couple, Adam and Eve, to picture and display **Christ's relationship to the church**. Again, Paul calls this a **"mystery"** because this **meaning of marriage** wasn't fully revealed until the coming of Christ and His death on the cross.

This is the **"mystery"** Paul describes in Ephesians chapter 5. God created the institution of marriage so that there would be a living, visible model in **husbands** of how Jesus came and died for His bride. And God created the institution of marriage so there would be a living, visible model in **wives** of how Christ's bride would respond to His love in submission.

Neither of these roles is **optional**. The definition of marriage isn't left for any group or culture to define. It isn't something that evolves as times and standards change. No. Paul says marriage is as constant in its meaning and significance as is the mission and message of Christ for His own Bride, the church.

We desperately need to have this big, well-rounded, Biblical framework behind our understanding of marriage. We need to be able to explain **why** only God gets to make the rules for marriage. Our world no longer seems to **"get it."** Marriage must maintain certain unchangeable characteristics if it's to picture what God, its Designer, wants it to picture about Christ and His church. And this meaning of marriage - this agenda **behind the scenes of creation** - is the mystery Paul unfolds in Ephesians chapter 5.

2) **JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO ESTABLISH THE PATTERN FOR THE HUSBAND'S LOVE FOR HIS OWN WIFE**

This is the text we will focus on for the remainder of this teaching:

**Ephesians 5:25** - "**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....**"

I hope you're starting to see that the cross is **vast** in its meaning for the church. Jesus died on the cross to provide forgiveness and grace to guilty sinners. Yes, that's true, but what else? Jesus died on the cross to cleanse the conscience before Father God. Yes, that's true, but what else? Jesus died to become our High Priest. Yes, that's true, but what else? Jesus died on the cross to establish the hope that through Christ's death, Father God will ultimately give us all things good and blessed. Yes, that's true, but what else?

Here's something else. Jesus died on the cross to **model the self-crucifying love the husband must show to his own wife**. Jesus died on the cross to **reveal this part of the mystery of the meaning of marriage**. Marriage is meant to make the meaning of Christ's love for His Bride **visible** in this world.

Now, think all of this through. If Father God knew, before He created one person, and before Jesus ever left the splendor of heaven, that the death of Jesus Christ, God the Son, was to model the love of husbands for their wives - if **this** was the plan from all eternity - then **Jesus also knew** when He came to the cross that this was part of the meaning of His own suffering and death.

Jesus came to the cross with **husbands** on His mind. Of course, He **died** for everyone, but He **modeled** something very specific for husbands to practice for their wives. When He laid down all His own rights He knew He was modeling the love of a husband for his own wife. When He suffered wrong without retaliation He knew He was modeling the kind of love a husband must show to his own wife. When He offered love and forgiveness while we were still undeserving and unresponsive He was modeling the love of a husband for his own wife. When He faced the cross, making **me** His ultimate concern rather than **Himself**, He was modeling the self-giving love of husbands for their own wives.

Hear Paul make the mystery of marriage plain. **"Husbands, here's what marriage is all about. Jesus died on the cross to fill marriage with its deepest and truest meaning. He revealed the pattern that was formed in God's heart from all eternity - the "mystery" revealed fully in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross - "Love your wives as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for her!"**

3) **THE CROSS-STYLED LOVE OF THE HUSBAND IS THE INITIATING FACTOR IN BOTH THE SUBMISSION OF THE WIFE AND THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT ENTERING THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP**

Again, remember the **"mystery of marriage"** revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. We finally realize, with the explanation of the New Testament apostles, that the cross of Jesus **explains** the meaning of marriage. With that in mind, let me ask an important question. **Just how far would our own redemption be an accomplished reality without the willingness of Jesus Christ to lay down His life for His Bride, the church?**

**Nothing** of the flow of God's power and grace works in our lives without the love of Jesus that produced the laying down of His own life. In just the same way, nothing of the life and power of God gets released and established in the **marriage relationship** apart from the self-crucifying love of a Christ-patterned husband for his wife.

Practically, this means it is **always** the husband's role to initiate healing, repentance, restoration and renewal in the marriage relationship. Whenever there is a problem of anger or dissension or bitterness between a husband and wife, the **husband** initiates the healing process. That's because the husband is to love the wife **"...as Christ loved the church" (4:25)**. Not only does this mean the husband loves the wife by laying down his life for her, but he does this **before** there is any willingness to receive or respond to this love.

Isn't that what the New Testament reveals about Christ's love for His bride, the church? Paul says Christ gave up His life for us **"while we were enemies" (Romans 5:10)**. That means **Jesus didn't limit His response on account of who's fault it was before He came and died**. He came and died when we were the sole source of the trouble. He came and died for people who rejected and abused Him. Now, says Paul, husbands are to love their own wives in exactly the same way.

**Blame isn't an issue**. Sin will **always** make us treat each other badly. But there's a pattern for healing and restoration. If husbands are to love their lives as Christ loved the church, they must lay down their lives to **initiate** the restoration process.

Of course, there will be many, many times when our troubles in marriage are of our own making. Earthly husbands aren't perfect as Jesus was. But that's not the point. The point of the divine pattern established in Christ is that **even when there is**

***absolutely no guilt at all - as in the case of Christ's relationship with the church - Jesus still initiates the restoration process.*** This is the pattern laid down for husbands for all times in the cross of Jesus Christ.

How precious is the cross of Christ for marriage. We all have our problems. We all sin against each other. But, in Christ - and ***only*** in Christ - we are ***freed from making our partner suffer for his or her sins.*** We're freed because we recognize that ***Jesus*** suffered for my spouse's sin. And if Jesus suffered for my spouse's sin I no longer have to make her or him suffer for those sins again. They are all fully paid for. ***Paul relates this truth especially to husbands. This is what frees husbands to initiate the healing process, just as Jesus Himself did, whether or not they are the ones who specifically caused the problem.***

4) **WHEN THE HUSBAND IS FAITHFUL TO FOLLOW HIS INITIATING ROLE IN DEMONSTRATING THE PATTERN OF SELF-CRUCIFYING LOVE IN MARRIAGE, I KNOW OF NO WIFE WHO WOULD FIND IT HARD TO FOLLOW HER RESPONSIBILITY**

I don't find it hard to love the Lordship of Jesus in my life. I don't ***resent*** His will. Why? Because He ***died*** for me. We love Him because He ***first*** loved us. He ***gave*** Himself for me and so I ***trust*** and ***embrace*** His headship over my life.

This is the divine mystery of marriage revealed fully in the cross of Jesus. Only here, in this final point, we are looking at the divine mystery of marriage from the role of the wife ***responding*** in Christ's love rather than the husband ***initiating*** Christ's love. Submission isn't mandated by commandment. It's won by ***laying down the life in self-sacrifice.*** Marriage and the church operate on the same pattern - the same flow-chart. Jesus died on the cross to provide the blueprint. And the whole church exists to prove it works.

Husbands, look carefully at the cross of Christ today. It contains ***more*** than just your forgiveness. It's your ***job description*** for loving your wife. And wives, pray for your husbands. They have a bigger job than they usually imagine. They will be helped by your prayer more than your criticism. And when you see the love of Jesus in them, embrace them for all they're worth. You have a treasure beyond telling.

And if you're here today with neither husband nor wife remember you are still loved this endlessly and this extensively by Jesus. Marriage is just a ***picture*** of Christ's love for you. His death on the cross is the measure of His commitment to your relationship with Him. He died for you whether you want to receive His love or not. There is nothing in this whole world that will stop Jesus from loving you. Respond as the bride of Christ. Yield to His grace and love. Eternal life begins with your response to His perfect love.