

NEXT: The Gospel and the Next Generation

The Gospel and Marriage

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May 29, 2011



The Gospel and Marriage Ephesians 5:22-23

Well, good morning. I invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to Ephesians 5:22-33. There is much ground to cover this morning as we continue talking about passing the gospel along to the next generation. And so this morning... The last two weeks we looked at a portrait of biblical manhood and biblical womanhood. And so this morning, as we think about passing the gospel along to the next generation, we're going to specifically see how it is that marriage accomplishes just that. I want to read from just the very end of the passage. John and Amy have already read the entirety of the passage so just to set the stage and remind us of what we're looking at—we're going to look at every verse eventually—but I want us to look at verse 33 as we begin. Paul says, *"However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband"* (Eph. 5:33).

I am immediately impressed with three realities from this text and from this passage. One, I have a good wife and I know that many others could echo the same sentiment, but... I've been married now to my wife Leslie for 13 years and I am just reminded over and over again—especially as I was looking at this text—I was just reminded of the grace of God to me in my wife. And I know that there are many husbands across this church that would say the very same thing, of how they are humbled and thankful for the grace of God in their life from their wives.

The second reality that I'm impressed with, though, is what a terrible husband I am. It's just... You know, you read a passage like this and it's just excruciating as you read the command and really the way that husbands are to love their wives. It's a difficult passage to prepare and a difficult passage to preach. I'm reminded of what C.J. Mahaney said—I was listening to a sermon that he preached on this particular passage—and this is what Mahaney said... He said, "I'm glad this hour of preaching has finally arrived. I've spent what seems like countless hours in the text. This has been so personally and so difficult and so convicting." He said, "It's a relief to project now some of that conviction on others. It's far more comforting when it's a group experience."

And so, I feel the same. I want you to feel terrible with me, all right? That's one of the aims this morning, all right? But in all seriousness, the truth that I am impressed with and that I want to leave you with above all else this morning is this: and that is, that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—His life, His death and His resurrection—the gospel is absolutely central to marriage. Books may help. In fact, there are many that do. Marriage retreats may be profitable. Many of them are. Counseling may be the gift of God to many couples. Oftentimes it is. But what I would remind you of this morning, brothers and sisters, as we come to this text, as we come to the Word of God, I would remind you that the most fundamental, the most important, the most basic, the most God-glorifying, the most essential ingredient in every single marriage is the gospel.

And so this morning, I have three primary aims and they're really reflected there in the outline if you want to go ahead and look to it. This morning I want to do three things as we look at Ephesians 5:22-33. Number one, I want to impress that reality upon your mind. I want to impress upon you the importance of the gospel in marriage. I want us to get at, as best we can from this text and as the Spirit helps us, I want us to understand essentially what is the meaning or what is the essence of marriage and how does the gospel show us that. So, what is the meaning of marriage?

Number two. I want there to be obedience to the gospel. I know I want that in my own life and I know husbands and wives across this room, born again by the Spirit of God, you want that as well. John MacArthur said this about marriage and I think that most of us could identify with this or at least would agree with this. He says, "Many marriages begin in a euphoric state of love and bliss. It gradually descends at varying rates into a state of war characterized by bickering, bitterness, discontent, unforgiveness, punctuated all along by moments of a truce." I suspect that that is the case here this morning. I am sure that by the grace of God there are homes here represented, marriages here represented, that have rock-solid marriages in the gospel. And we ought to thank God for that.

But I am sure at the same time, while there are homes that are rock-solid in terms of their marriage, there are also homes here this morning, marriages represented here this morning, even, in this room right now that are teetering on the brink and that could go either way. And no doubt, knowing those polar opposites (marriages that are rock-solid and marriages that are on the brink), no doubt there are many that are in between. And so, this morning I pray that God would use this text—that He would use the words—that we would remember that these are the words of the living God—that He would impress them upon our hearts and He would bring about the fruit of gospel obedience in our lives: submissive wives and loving husbands.

And I pray, number three, not only that there would be deep conviction about what marriage is, not only that there would be gospel fruit in terms of our marriage, but I want there to be hope evident this morning in the gospel. I know there are a variety of circumstances represented across this room and there are some that have failed in the past in terms of their marriage and there are many that are failing now and there are even marriages that are not failing presently or haven't failed in the past but may fail in the future. And so this morning I want to impress upon you the hope that we have, the forgiveness that we find, the grace that is available to us in and through the gospel. Is that good? You ready for that? Let's do that this morning. Let's look at the gospel in our marriages.

The Mystery of the Gospel in Marriage

And we're going to begin with the mystery of the gospel in marriage. And so we're going to ask the question first, what is the essence of marriage? Before we talk about what does the gospel look like in our marriages and before we talk about how we are strengthened by that, what is the essence of our marriages all about? Let's look at the mystery of the gospel in marriage. And we're going to begin—it's an odd place... We read verses 22 through 33 and normally we would begin just kind of working through 22, 23, 24. But I want us to move all the way to the end of the passage, all the way to verse 31, because I really believe that of all the verses, verses 31 and 32 in this particular passage, they hold the key for unlocking what Paul is saying about marriage in this book.

Look if you would in Ephesians 5:31. You'll notice there that it's in quotation marks, right, and so Paul is quoting from Genesis 2:24. You may want to write that out beside in your notes. He's quoting from Genesis 2:24. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Now this is a text that we looked at a couple of weeks ago and so you remember, that as David was unpacking two weeks ago biblical roles, manhood and womanhood, that we looked at this passage. And it's kind of in the context where Adam is exulting over his wife. God has made Eve from the rib of Adam. And so Moses interprets that... Earlier Moses kind of expands upon that and he says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife..."* (Gen. 2:24). And so, in the context of Genesis, and this is key, in the context of Genesis, this verse is entirely about marriage.

But I want you to notice what Paul does in verse 32 and this is the verse you may want to underline or at least make a note of in your notes as well. Verse 32 really holds the key. Look at what Paul says in light of that verse. He's quoted Genesis 2 and he says "this mystery." And now, "this mystery," I think, refers to that very last phrase where he says, "...the two shall become one flesh." And so, that "mystery," okay? "That mystery is," Paul says, "it is profound," and he says, "I am saying..." And I want you... I want to stop right there before we even move on to what he says about it. He says, "I am saying about that mystery..."

It's the very same phrase that is used... You remember in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus is teaching and He tells them that their righteousness (the people that are listening), He says, "Your righteous must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. You'll never into the kingdom of heaven." And then He begins to offer some alternatives, ways that the Scriptures were interpreted by His contemporaries and really what He says about the Scriptures. And He uses this phrase over and over again. He says, "You have heard it said," but what? "But I say unto you..." Six times. "You have heard it said... but I say unto you," in Matthew 5.

That is the very same phrase that Paul is using here in Ephesians 5:32. He says, "I am saying." In other words, "I am interpreting this for you." We understand what it has meant, okay? That's what Paul is saying. "We understand what it has meant but I am interpreting it for you." And he says, "This mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

The Mystery of the Gospel in Marriage is Ultimate

And I want you to notice two things that Paul says about this mystery. First, notice the mystery of the gospel in marriage is ultimate. Paul is saying that the mystery of the gospel in marriage is ultimate. And you say, "Well, what do you mean by that? What do you mean by the mystery of the gospel in marriage is ultimate?" I want you to see what Paul is doing, what Paul is saying here. Paul understood this verse. It's not like Paul gets it wrong. It's not like Paul is failing Bible Interpretation 101, all right? He understood that Genesis 2:24, in its context, is referring to the union of a man and a woman. He understood that that verse has a primary reference to marriage. He understood that for a 1,000 years people had interpreted it in that exact way.

Now what I want you to see is Paul is not discounting—he's not doing away with the traditional interpretation. All right? That's key. He's not saying, "No, they were wrong in the way that they understood it." He is simply saying, "I am adding something to it." All right? Now, as a side note, we don't get that liberty, all right, okay? This is an apostolic privilege, okay, that we don't have, all right? And so, this is revelation. This is something that is new from Paul. He's saying, "This mystery is profound and I am saying..." Listen. This is what

he's saying. He's saying, "What I am saying is that there is something that is more fundamental. There is something that is more basic in this text, in this mystery, than the mere union of a man and a woman."

What he is saying is that the essence of marriage is not found primarily in companionship or sexual union or happiness or personal fulfillment. Even though marriage does all of those things, he's saying the essence of marriage is not found in any of those things that we normally look to—particularly that our culture normally looks to—to find the essence of marriage. He says the essence of marriage is found in the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church. And it's vital that we understand what Paul is saying. To say it another way, Paul is saying that the relationship between Christ and the church is ultimate—marriage is not.

You see how we often get that backwards? And sometimes we think that what Paul is doing, is Paul is looking—he's talking about a man and a wife and he just said, "You know, I need to give them some instructions about how they need to live together, husbands and wives. And so I really need an illustration. If I could just come up something that would communicate what is going in a husband... Oh! Christ and the church." But that's not at all what Paul is saying. Paul is saying that the more essential thing, the more primary thing, is Christ and the church and that marriage then is to be a picture of that.

Which means that for every single one of us, for every marriage that is represented in this room, our marriages are intended to be a parable of the gospel. Every single marriage in this room is meant to point to the truth of a crucified and risen Savior who has died for His church and is redeeming her unto Himself. Every marriage is meant to be, by the grace of God, the best echo—the most faithful reflection—of that relationship that can possibly be.

John Piper says it this way: "Marriage is not mainly about being or staying in love." Isn't that what our culture says marriage is about? He said it's not about that at all. "It's mainly about telling the truth with our lives." I love that line: "marriage is mainly about telling the truth"—namely, the truth of Jesus and the church—"it's mainly about telling the truth with our lives. Marriage is a pointer toward the glory of Christ and the church. It's about portraying something true about Jesus Christ and the way that He relates to His people. It's about showing in real life the glory of the gospel." Which means that for every wife, she is intended to portray the Church to the world. Every wife in this room is intended to portray the church to the world, a church that depends on... A church that serves, a church that finds its life and glory in Christ. And conversely, every husband then, is intended in marriage to portray Christ to the world, a Savior who at great cost purchased a Church to love and perfects that Church in that love.

What I want you to... What I want, at least in my marriage and I know that hearts all across this room with the very same thing. I want us in this body to hold marriage in esteem—to give marriage its rightful place. But what I would discourage is that we give marriage an ultimate place. That ultimate place belongs to Christ and the church, and every marriage is intended to be a reflection. You say, "How do you... Are you sure about that? Are you sure about that because it seems to be undermining the institution of marriage."

Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 22:30? He said, "*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage...*" In other words, marriage has a temporary function. I'm not saying that we shouldn't be fulfilled in our marriage. "I hope you go out and you have an unfulfilled..." That's not what I'm saying, all right? Be fulfilled! All right? Be happy! All right? We ought to be happy in our marriage, okay? That's not the ultimate goal.

The ultimate goal is for all of our marriages to picture the relationship, this mystery: the union of the intimate, the vital, the lovely union between Christ and the Church.

The Mystery of the Gospel in Marriage is Profound

So why is that such a big deal? Well, I think Paul tells us because the mystery of the gospel is not only ultimate. The mystery of the gospel in marriage is profound. He says, "This mystery is profound" (Eph. 5:32). In other words, it's great. It is loaded with significance. Why is it so important, brothers and sisters? Why is it so important that we accurately display the relationship between Christ and the Church in our marriages? Well, I'm sure that we could give other reasons but I just want to provide two. And I think they're sufficient motivation for us to latch onto this truth.

Number one: because our Savior is exalted in gospel-centered marriage. Because our Savior is exalted in gospel-centered marriage. And I think that's obvious on the face of it but I want to give you a glimpse into Ephesians just for a moment, all right? And I wish we had time! I wish we had time to unpack this in all of its beauty. But I want to show you this in a way that we normally don't think about: how the Savior is exalted in gospel-centered marriage. I want you to look back to Ephesians 5, begins to begin in verse 15, all right? You'll notice that if your Bible is kind of broken up into paragraphs, you'll see that verse 15 is kind of a new section, kind of a transition. And so, there's further application. And that's really where this section on marriage finds its beginning, all right? And so, you may want to kind of note that. This is where this section...

So when Paul says, "*Look carefully then how you walk*" (Eph. 5:15), one of the ways that we are careful in our walk is in our marriages. Does that make sense? So, this idea of "be careful in the way that we walk" is played out—one of the ways—in our marriage and the way that we raise our children and the way that employees relate to employers, as we'll see in the next few passages.

But I want you to notice what he says. "*...not as unwise but as wise* [verse 16—this is what you want to underline or make a note of] *making the best use of the time, [why?] because the days are evil.*" All right? It doesn't mean sunshine is evil, it just simply means that we live in a world in which the forces of evil are arrayed against the forces of heaven. Okay? So we live in a fallen world. There are real demons and there are real devils and there is a real fallenness to the world that we inhabit. And so, I want you to notice that that's the beginning, okay? So keep that in mind. 5:15, 5:16—the days are evil.

Now, I want you to look at what brackets these passages, okay? These passages on the family in particular. Look at chapter 6:10, all right? Chapter 6:10 where Paul says, "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.* [This is a more familiar passage.] *Put on the whole armor of God, [why?] that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*" Notice that. Now we are right back into this arena, all right, of spiritual warfare. "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" In other words, these verses about the family—this is what I want you to see—these verses about the family that we are paying attention to this morning, they are set within the larger context of spiritual warfare.

Now, some of you are saying, "Well, you didn't have to point me to those verses to know that there's spiritual warfare in my home. I mean, I get that." All right? I mean, we know. We know that every marriage in this room is under attack in two ways: one, from within and two, from without. Every marriage is under attack both from within as we are fallen sinners and also from without as the forces of evil are arrayed against us. And I think that

ought to cause two reactions in us. One, I think it ought to... I don't know if frighten is the right word but it ought to alarm us. It ought to heighten our awareness of what is going on in our marriages. "Why is it that she behaves that way? Why does he behave that way, okay?" There may be more than just circumstantial evidence that is at work.

So one, it ought to alarm us but I think also it ought to remind us of the greater truth. And that greater truth is that Jesus reigns over every demon and every devil. That is exactly what Paul says and in fact, it's a major theme within this book. It's one of the reasons I wish that we had time to unpack all this. But I'm just going to read—you can look over there if you want in Ephesians 1:20-23—where you read Paul writing: "...that [God] worked in Christ when he raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [And listen to this: He seated Jesus] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

So what that means for us practically speaking is that when our marriages reflect Christ and the church as they ought, at the very same time—listen to me—at the very same time, they reflect, they proclaim to the powers, they proclaim to the rulers, they proclaim to the authorities, they proclaim to the prince of the power of the air the absolute authority and supremacy of Christ. When we align ourselves with what the Word has for us in terms of husbands and wives, we are sending a signal by the grace of God to every demon and every devil that Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone reigns supreme; that He has conquered death, hell and the grave; that He has the keys to the kingdom; and that He shares the spoils of war with His people; that He has taken what is ruined in terms of relationship and He has redeemed them all to the glory of God the Father.

And brothers and sisters, when we get that in our heads, when we realize that that is at stake, we realize that that is on the line, we ought to be convinced that marriage is important—that the gospel in marriage is vital. It's not just about our personal happiness. It's not just about the... The goal in our marriages is not just the absence of fighting. It's not just the absence of conflict. It's the proclamation of the gospel and of the reign and victory of Jesus over the demons and the Devil.

Our Savior is exalted when marriages are founded in the gospel. And not only that, but our witness is enhanced in gospel-centered marriage. I think this is obviously true when you think about all the magazines that celebrate everything but marriage. When you think about the way that spouses belittle and disparage one another, oftentimes in public. You think about all the ways that marriage is spoken against in our culture. You think about all the ways that marriage is perverted into something that it was never intended to be in our particular culture.

In marriage, there is the opportunity—we have the opportunity in marriage to display something different to the watching world. That doesn't mean that we don't give ourselves to verbal proclamation of the gospel but it does mean that when we speak up about the gospel, our credibility is enhanced by our marriages that reflect the very same message. And it reflects something totally different than what people are accustomed to. And so for our neighbors and for our coworkers—as we think about this series—for our children, for the sake of the advance of the gospel, we must give ourselves, then, to marriages that are rooted in the gospel.

And so we see Paul... Paul lays out... Really the interpretive key to it all—the mystery of the gospel in marriage—that marriage is intended to be a picture. That is the essence of our

marriage. It's intended to be a picture of Christ and the church. You say, "Well, what does that look like? How do we know that when we see it? How do we know that when it is? We're just kind of going along day to day. And we're going to school and we're going to work and we're just kind of making ends meet. How do we know? How do we come aside and say, 'Am I really doing that? Am I really exalting the Savior in my marriage? Am I really proclaiming the gospel in my words and then backed up by my marriage?'"

The Marks of the Gospel in Marriage

The Marks of the Gospel Among Wives is Glad Submission

Well, I think we see that in verses 22 all the way to verse 29 and 30, as Paul talks about the marks of the gospel in marriage. And I want to draw your attention, first of all, to what Paul goes to first and that is the mark of the gospel among wives. And it is simply stated there in your notes: the mark of the gospel among wives is to be glad submission. The mark of the gospel... How do we know that we're achieving this? The mark of the gospel among wives is glad submission. I'm not going to take time, certainly, to unpack all that David has unpacked the last few weeks. And we've talked about the equality of men and women. It's not because I don't believe in it, it's just we don't have time this morning.

Men and women are equal in the sight of God. Both are image bearers. Both are one in Christ. Matthew Henry said, "The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam. Not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be beloved." I don't think you can get that from the Genesis text but nevertheless, I think it captures the essence of what we're talking about which is there is an equality. It's not that husbands are up here and wives are down here, or that wives are up here and husbands are down here. There is an absolute equality but there is a difference. There is a distinction in the ways in which they relate with each other.

And so what I want to do this morning is I want to kind of tease out—there are more that we could kind of work through—but I want to tease out three ways that we see submission talked about here in these particular verses. Notice, first, it is a submission that is willing. It is a submission that is willing. Read with me if you would in Ephesians 5:22 where Paul begins. And he says, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands...*" Now just as an aside, it's interesting that Paul even addresses wives. If you read other, what are called household codes from the same era (Greek and Roman), they don't even address the wife. Over and over, it's just kind of... They'll talk about how the husband has to be an authority in the home. But Paul actually addresses the wife, and he says to the wife, as she is an intelligent image bearer of God. He says, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands...*" It is a submission that is willing.

The reason that I use that word... It's interesting that the... What is called the voice of the verb that Paul uses here in the original language. Now, it's been a little while since grammar school for most of us but if you remember that there are kind of two voices that we typically use in our English language. We use active voice and passive voice. And so if we want to talk about something in the active voice, we say what, like, "The boy hit the ball." Okay? That's active. The boy hit the ball. Okay? But if we want to say it in the passive, we would say something like, "The boy was hit by the ball." So something happened to him. What's interesting in the language of the New Testament that there is what's called—between that active and passive voice—there is something called the middle voice. And the middle voice is a voice that is used to refer to an action that is done by oneself oftentimes to oneself. You

see that? You see that it is an action done by oneself but oftentimes it is done to oneself. And that is the voice that is used here in Ephesians 5:21, 22 and in verse 24. Wives... Literally, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands."

I sometimes hear people say, "You know, that husband, he needs to get his house in order. He needs to make his wife submit." That just misses the point. It misses the point of what Paul is saying here of a voluntary, a willing submission. And in a more important way, it misses the point of the gospel in marriage because it is not as though—think about it, church—it is not as though the Church is being dragged along kicking and screaming in obedience to Christ. Where Jesus goes by the grace of God, we want to go with Him. We want to obey the voice of our Savior. We want to follow wherever He would lead. And that is the very same idea. That is the very same concept that is pictured here as the husband is leading. There is a glad and willing submission that takes place on the part of the wife. This is submission that is willing.

But notice also it is a submission that is reverent. It is a submission that is reverent. Look again in verse 22, the end of that passage...the end of that verse, rather. "*Wives, submit to your own husbands* [and notice the kind of the descriptor or the qualifier that he adds], *as to the Lord*." Now some take this and interpret this to mean that a wife is to submit to her husband as if he is indeed the Lord. And I've read of circumstances where wives are asking their husbands if they can get up and use the restroom. I don't think that's what is...I don't think that's what is intended here. And I think if we interpret it in that way, as though the husband were the Lord, then if we're not careful, very careful, we'll be led into all sorts of abuses.

Rather, what I think Paul is intending to communicate here is that part of, ladies, part of your obedience to God is your obedience to your husband. Part and parcel of the way that you reverence Christ, part and parcel of the way that you worship Christ, is that you follow your husband in his leadership.

Now I think it's at this point— in fact I know it's at this point—that we are reminded of our need for the gospel. I don't know if you know this, ladies, but some husbands are not easy to submit to. Some husbands, I hear, some husbands make dumb decisions, some husbands say dumb things, some husbands do dumb things. But I want to remind you from this verse, verse 22, that it is not the worth of the husband that calls for submission but it is the worth of the Savior that calls for submission. You hear what I'm saying? It's not the worth of the husband. It's not, "Oh, if he would just finally lead. You know, if he were worthy of being submitted to, then I would submit."

Ladies, that is the voice of the serpent in your ear. "Submit to your own husbands," he says, "as an act of reverence, out of..." Verse 33 says it this way: "Out of fear." The same word we get *phobia* from. It's a reverence. It's a respect for the husband. There is a willing submission. There is a reverent submission.

And notice, third, last, there is a—it is submission that is comprehensive. Now, I want to make sure that when we look at verse 24 and we hear that wives should submit in everything—there's the word where I'm taking that from—in everything to their husbands. I want you to understand that that does not include sinful behavior. And so if your husband is seeking to lead you into sinful behavior, I believe we have Scriptural evidence and Scriptural mandate not to follow him into that. In Acts 5:29, Peter and the apostles answer the authorities. They said, "We must obey God rather than whom? We must obey God rather than men." And so, it doesn't mean that we are to follow husbands into...that ladies are supposed to follow husbands into sinful behavior.

Nor does it mean, in any way, that wives are to submit generically to all men. In fact, verse 24 says they *"should submit in everything to their husbands."* So it doesn't give license for any man in this congregation to go to any woman and say, "I like my steak medium-well." You know? It doesn't work that way. There's not a generic submission. This is submission that is specific. It is to their husbands. But what I want to be very careful to do is... I want to be careful that we do not explain away and we do not qualify such that we never hear what Paul is actually saying. And that is, "Wives, submit in everything to your husbands."

It doesn't matter... It's not just... It's not a matter of the state of your marriage. It's not just when you first get married, submit. When things are going good, submit. When things are looking up. When you feel like it, submit. When he's brought you roses or he's bought you a new piece of jewelry, then you should submit. When he is finally leading like he ought to. When he's being the spiritual head of the home like he ought to. When he's loving you as Christ loved the church, then you are to submit. That is not at all what is being said here. In all things, in all ways, in all seasons, in all attitudes, in all dispositions, there should be a yielding—a glad-hearted yielding submission—to the husband.

I'm reminded of a story from E.V. Hill. Now some of you may remember E.V. Hill. He was an African-American preacher, oftentimes he was on TV years ago, but... He has since gone to be with the Lord but before he passed away, his wife preceded him in death. He lost his wife to cancer. And E.V. Hill preached his wife's funeral and he told this story at her funeral. He said:

As a young preacher he was struggling. He was struggling to earn a living and he came home one night and said he found the house dark. And he opened the door and he saw his wife, Jane, there. She had prepared for him a candlelight dinner. And delighted, he walked in and saw that and said, "Let me go wash up." And so he went to the bathroom and he flicked the switch but the light didn't come on. And so he thought, "Well, maybe the light's blown," and so he just kind of washed his hands and he walked out and he flipped the switch on in the hallway and still no light. And so he went into the kitchen and he said, he asked his wife. He said, "Why is the electricity off?" And he said then she began to cry. And she said, "You work so hard and we're trying but it's pretty rough. I didn't have enough money to pay the light bill. I just didn't want you to know about it so I thought we would just eat by candlelight." He concluded that illustration, he said, "She could have said, 'I've never been in this situation before. I was reared in the home of a doctor and we never had our lights cut off.' She could have broken my spirit. She could have ruined me. She could have demoralized me. But instead she said, 'Somehow or other we'll get these lights back on. But tonight we eat by candlelight.'"

I think that typifies what we see in Ephesians 5:22-24. A wife that no matter the circumstances, no matter the difficulty, because of the gospel in and through her, yields in a submissive way but not only outwardly, but a heart that gladly submits to her husband. The mark of the gospel among the wives is glad submission.

The Marks of the Gospel Among Husbands is Sacrificial Love

The mark of the gospel among husbands is sacrificial love. The mark of the gospel among husbands is sacrificial love. I think it's instructive and I just want to call your attention to this. I think it's instructive to note that after reading Paul's command to wives which is to submit, one would think that Paul then would tell husbands to lead, to be the head, to be the authority. That's what you see in all the other household codes of Paul's day. But notice that Paul does not call husbands to lead. Rather, Paul calls husbands to love. In fact, four times he says. He says it in verse 25, he says it twice in verse 28 and then he says it again in verse 33.

Paul says in verse 25, first, that love must be costly. The kind of love that he's talking about...that we must display—that husbands must display toward their wives—it is a love, first, that is costly. Now, Paul says in verse 25, "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*" I think that's a difficult verse for us to get our minds around. It's a difficult verse, I think, in some ways to even interpret. I mean, what does it mean? You know, when you think about... You know, you think about submission... I mean, that kind of makes sense. What does it look like? And we, in fact, we are all called to submit in all kinds of areas of life. And so we submit to authorities and we submit to authorities even within the church. And so, we kind of have a feel—all of us do, male and female—for what submission kind of looks like in daily life. But what does it mean for a husband to, as Paul says in verse 25, to love his wife and to give himself up for her?

Well, I think we can be helped by John MacArthur's words here where he kind of gives a description of what it might look like. I mean, these... And I know that this could be—this could apply in a thousand different ways. But I want you to hear his words of what it might look like for a husband to die to his self and die—lay down his life—for his wife. Listen to what he says. He says:

"When your good is evil spoken of, when she misunderstands you, when your desires are not interesting to her, when your advice is disregarded and your opinions are ridiculed and when you are abused and when you are mistreated and misunderstood, and yet you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, that is dying to oneself. [He says] When you are content with any food, any clothes, any house, any location, as long as provision is made for her [your wife], that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in a conversation or to record or to recite your own good works [how close does that one hit to home?] or to pursue commendation for yourself, but instead seek her commendation, her interest, her praise, that is dying to self. When you see her prosper and reach goals that you desired for yourself and you can honestly rejoice with her in your spirit, that is dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof from your wife and humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, feeling no rebellion and feeling no resentment rising within your heart, that is dying to self."

You see, most of us, I think, most husbands in this room would gladly interpose our bodies and lay down our lives to physically protect our wives. And we ought to do that. If the circumstance ever arises where we have to place our health instead, we ought to do that. But I doubt as many of us would resonate with what John MacArthur says is dying to self in all kinds of daily decisions, in all kinds of daily conflicts, in all kinds of daily conversations. It is a love that is costly.

And it is also a love that unconditional. In fact, I want to take the next two together. You see that it's a love that is unconditional and it is a love that is effective. And I want to show you why I want to take these two together, because I think they encapsulate what is said in verses 26 and 27. Read with me if you would where Paul describes this love, all right? It's the love of Christ for the church, okay? But it is an unconditional and it is a purposeful or effective love. And this is what he says: He loved the church "*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.*"

Now, I love the background that Paul is using here. You might want to write out in your notes or maybe in your Bible out beside this passage—Ezekiel 16:1-14. Ezekiel 16:1-14. We

don't have time to go and to look into that passage in-depth but I want to read just a few snippets of that, all right? Of Ezekiel 16:1-14 because it really forms the background. You'll hear some of the language of washing the wife and presenting the wife as splendor. It's a context in which God is looking at Israel and He's recounting how merciful and how gracious He has been to her and how loving He has been despite the unworthy nature of His bride. And I want you to listen. He says:

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you... "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' [He says in verse 9] Then I bathed you with water [It's the very same image that Paul is using here in Ephesians 5] and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. [Verse 11] And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck... and a beautiful crown on your head... [And then the capstone of it in verse 14. Listen to how God is purposeful in the way He loves Israel.] And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.

Now I want you to notice a couple things. One, what we see in Ezekiel 16 and what Paul is pointing us to in Ephesians 5, is a love that exists, that persists, that is deep, that is intense, despite the worth of the bride. Now, I'm not... By the way, husbands, this is not like a good line to use like, "I loved you and yet you were totally unworthy." You know? "You were like Israel. You were lying..." No. Don't use that, all right? Don't use that. That's not the parallel. The point we're making is the manner in which God loves. It is not, to put it in more concrete terms...

It doesn't matter if your wife never submits a day, an hour, a minute, or a second. It's a love that's unconditional. It doesn't matter if her body falls apart, if it gets out of shape, if her hair is long or short, colored, greying or falling out. It doesn't matter if a newer model comes along. It doesn't matter if she's bitter, mean spirited, nagging and quarrelsome, not that any ladies in this room would be that.

It's a love that is unconditional. Why? Because it is the very same love—it is modeled and flows from the very same love—that God has displayed toward us as sinners: "...but God shows his love for us [Romans 5:8 says] in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And it is the eternal and unconditional love that is evidenced over and over in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Husbands, we love our wives with an unconditional love that is also effective.

You say, "What do you mean? What do you mean by effective?" And I want to be careful. I don't want to lay undue burdens. I don't want to put anything on you that is not in the Word. And I think this can play out in a thousand different ways but I think at least what Paul is saying here when he says, "...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing..." that there should be...that the nature of our love should be such that it promotes the gospel in our wives. Such that it promotes, it causes our wives to flourish in the gospel, in and through the gospel.

It's a tragedy that more wives lead spiritually in their homes than husbands. I'm not saying that everybody's got to be a theologian or... That's not what I'm saying. But husbands, we need to take our family to church. We need to hear the gospel proclaimed. We need to

make sure that the Word of God is central in our homes. We need to lead, even if it's basic, even if it's all that we can do. I've never known a wife... I've never known a wife whose husband was doing the best that he could in terms of leading his wife, leading his family, spiritually... If his heart was that, I've never heard a wife complain about that. It is always about, not effort, but absenteeism. Love our wives with a love that is costly, a love that is unconditional, a love that causes the gospel to flourish in our homes and particularly in our wives.

And finally, it is a love that is tender. Look 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..."* I think there is a parallel idea in 1 Peter 3:7. You may want to write that down. First Peter 3:7 where Peter says, *"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way..."* Doesn't that say so much? *"Live with your wives in an understanding way."* You know, we never get impatient with ourselves, husbands? But we frequently get impatient with the things our wives do and the progress that our wife makes in the Lord. Live in an understanding way. Why? Well, he says: *"showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel..."*

You say, "What does Peter mean by wives being the weaker vessel?" I don't know. I'm not going to unpack it. I don't know. I'd like to get out of here alive. I don't know what it means. You'll have to ask Peter, all right? It means something, all right? I know it means something. And so, let's just take it at face value for whatever he means. The weaker vessel. Let us then... That calls for it, though, does it not? Think about a vessel that is fragile. And so it calls for a tender love. It calls for a careful and intentional love. It calls for the very same kind of love that Jesus has displayed toward us. A love that is patient. A love that is kind. A love that is full of grace and mercy.

The Motivation of the Gospel in Marriage

The mark of the gospel among wives is glad submission. The mark of the gospel among husbands is sacrificial love. Now I want to close in this way because I think, in fact I fear, that too many times when it comes to marriage, even when it comes to this text in Ephesians 5... We often read Ephesians 5 in abstract, as if it is just the only word that we have about marriage and as if there is nothing that comes before what Paul says in Ephesians 5 and nothing that comes after. And what I want to avoid this morning is I want to avoid, with all of my heart, I want to avoid this sermon crushing husbands and wives. Because I know all across this room right now there are ladies that are saying, "You know what? I can see this area and this area and this way that I fall short." And there are husbands that are saying the very same thing: "I am not loving my wife as Christ has loved the church."

In the Gospel, We Receive the Mercy of Our God

Now what I want to be careful to do is here, just like in the rest of the Scriptures, let us let the law of Christ drive us to the gospel of Christ. Let us let the law of Christ make us run to the gospel of Christ. And what I mean by that is just this: that we need not only to believe the gospel and apply the gospel but we need the gospel for the strength to do either one of those things.

And so specifically, it is in the gospel that we receive the mercy of God. Before we do anything, I would caution you, husband, wife, or maybe even those that are not husbands

and wives—those that are even looking toward marriage—I would caution before we resolve to do anything, before we determine any path, any correction, any action, I would encourage us before we do, that we receive. That we receive the mercy of God in Christ. That's why I put Ephesians 2:4-5 where Paul says, "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved...*" Notice, brothers and sisters, that that verse is prior to what we read about in marriage. By grace you have been saved. That is prior. All of... Really from chapter 4 of Ephesians all the way to chapter 6, all of it flows out of that reality.

And so, so I want you to see that your reality—please hear me—your identity is not first and foremost, ladies, your identity first and foremost is not that of a rebellious wife. Your identity, brothers, is not first and foremost that of a failed husband. If you have placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, your identity—as Ephesians 1, 2 and 3 speaks to us—your identity is that of someone who is chosen before the foundation of the world. Someone who is predestined for adoption in Christ Jesus. Someone who is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Someone who has the Spirit of God, who is sealed with the Spirit of God. Someone who, like Christ, was dead but has been raised up, has been seated in the heavenly places and in the ages to come will be shown the immeasurable riches of the kindness of God in Christ. That is your identity. And it is out of that heart and out of that reminder that we then...that we since seek to apply what we have heard this morning.

In the Gospel, We Have the Help of the Spirit

We remember the mercy of God and number two, in the gospel we have the help of the Spirit. In the gospel not only did we receive the mercy of God, we receive the help...or we have the help of the Spirit. There are no doubt—if you don't mind, keep your Bibles open just one second—there are no doubt husbands and wives saying, "I can't do this." And my response to that would be, not surprisingly, "You're right. Amen. You can't do this. You don't have it in you to do this in and of yourself." That's why we have to back to the very fountainhead of this passage in chapter 5:18 where Paul says, "Do not be drunk with wine, for that leads to debauchery." He said, "Don't be drunk with wine, for that leads to debauchery, *but be filled with the Spirit.*"

And so out of that filling of the Spirit there comes psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, there comes listening to the Word of Christ, there comes submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, and there comes wives who submit to their husbands and husbands who love their wives. And so I would remind you that...don't be surprised at your failure but don't be foolish either and think that you have it within yourself, within your power, within your strength apart from the gospel to obey the words of Christ. We are nothing. Only in the gospel can we obey.

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