

God's Good Design

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[0 : 00] Father, this is your words, uttered for our goods, that we might be who we were made to be. So let us come before it now with humble hearts, that you might speak to each and every one of us here, that we might live to your glory in all that we do. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Well, as we've been going through the book of Ephesians as a church family, we have, I hope you'll agree, seen something beautiful.

The church. The church is beautiful because she is loved by a beautiful Savior.

All right, but Paul is writing this book to a church in the ancient city of Ephesus. It was a city that was dominated by the pagan temple of Artemis, one of the kind of wonders of the ancient world. And in the streets below, this great and beautiful in the eyes of the world temple made with human hands, hidden in some of the houses below, is the church of Christ.

[1 : 23] The vast temple of Ephesus, the little church of Christ. What is greater? What is more beautiful?

Well, Paul writes this letter in part to remind or tell the Ephesians that whatever outward appearances might suggest, nothing. Nothing. Right? Nothing compares to the beauty of Christ and his church.

It is beautiful. But what does this beautiful relationship look like? That's just where I want us to begin this morning. Looking at our first point, Christ and his church.

Christ and his church, because this is the theme, right, that controls the whole passage that we just read together at the end of Ephesians 5.

Who is Christ in relation to his church? Just flick back with me there to the end of chapter 1. Chapter 1, verse 22.

[2 : 29] What do we see there? And he, that that is God, put all things under his, that that is Christ's feet, and gave him, Christ, as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

We saw the same thing again a few chapters later in chapter 4. Christ is the head of the church into whom we, the body, are to be growing together.

That is the structure of this beautiful relationship between Christ and his church that we have seen through this letter so far. Maybe just let me say right now, what one thing is obvious there, isn't it? Both from the text, but also from straightforward logic. The head and the body have different roles, don't they? That they are of equal value and importance, right?

A head without a body isn't about to do much. Likewise, a body without a head isn't going to get very far, but you can and should expect the head and the body to be doing different things.

[3 : 43] And that's exactly what we see between Christ and his church. So let's just look for a moment at how the church, how Christ relates to his church, and then how the church relates to Christ.

Sorry, you're going to do this slightly the other way around from what you have on your service sheets. So we'll begin with Christ's love for his church. Christ loves the church.

We've seen that all over Ephesians, haven't we? If we went through all the particular references, we'd be here all morning. Let me just summarize what we've seen. There was a time, wasn't there, when we were walking against God, against Jesus, and so rightly and justly deserving his wrath. But what happened then? 2 verse 4, because of God's great love, God's great love, It gave us a new purpose.

And he has loved us not just to be his, but so that we would be beautiful. He loves us not for his own sake, but for our sake.

[5 : 32] Jesus doesn't love the church because she is beautiful. Jesus loves the church so that he can make her more and more beautiful. It is unconditional, unmerited love.

It is a love that is not earned, but rather given freely, whether it is deserved or not. It is a love that is costly to Christ. It is a love that nourishes and cherishes what has been given to him.

It is a love that causes him to love the church as his very own body. It is a love that is for us, even when we are not for ourselves.

It is a love that cares for us, even when we cannot care for ourselves. It is a love that makes us beautiful, even when we try to ruin ourselves.

It is a love that gives more than we could ever earn. This is the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

[6 : 47] It is the greatest love this world has ever known, and we are the ones who receive it. That is our heads.

And so we, don't we, we as the body of Christ, the church, we joyfully and gladly submit to him, don't we? Our second point there, that the church submits to her head.

Jesus, right, Jesus is in charge. He is the one who has been raised far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named. He is undoubtedly in the position of authority.

He's head over all things, including the church. And because of who Jesus is, both in authority and in character, we don't, do we as a church, kind of begrudgingly follow him?

No, we delight to follow him because he is our heads, because we know he loves us, and we know we can trust him who laid down his life for us, even when we don't understand where he's leading us.

[7 : 54] Our submitting to him is not, is it shameful or demeaning? It is an honor to come under his shadow and allow him to rule in our lives because he loves us more than we love ourselves.

Submitting to Jesus is a privilege and a joy. There is nothing better we can do. And submitting to Jesus, doesn't it mean submitting everything to Jesus?

No area of our life untouched. Let's pause for a moment there. I wonder if that's something you can say of your own relationship with Jesus this morning.

Does he get into every nook and cranny? Or are there some parts you try and keep to yourself? It's a question we should be asking ourselves as a church.

Right? Is Jesus everywhere? Not just the main thing, but the one who is over all and in all and through all. Because that, as we saw in chapter four, that is the way in which the church will make the wisdom of God known by growing up in every way into him who is our head, Jesus Christ.

[9 : 08] So the church submits to her head in all things, and Christ loves his church in order to make her beautiful. I hope you can see, at least in part by this point, that the Christ and his church is a truly beautiful relationship.

There is no better union in heaven or earth because of the love that Christ has for his church and because of the way that the church submits to Christ.

There is nothing like it. There is nothing better than it. Look with me now at verse 31 and 32 of chapter five.

Right here, I think, are the mind-blowing, paradigm-shifting verses that will explain why we've spent so much time thinking about Christ and his church in a passage in wives and husbands. Verse 31, Paul quotes there from Genesis 2.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. I reckon that's a verse we've all heard before.

[10 : 24] If you've been to just even a handful of weddings, you've probably heard it. If you've made it to page two of the Bible, you've probably read it. Here's the question, though. What is that verse talking about?

Husbands and wives, right? Well, actually, Paul says, not really.

Or at least not in the way we usually think. What does he say in verse 32? This mystery is profound, and I'm saying, literally there, I say to you, it's the same kind of authoritative figure of speech that Jesus uses so frequently, I say to you that it, that verse in Genesis 2, refers to Christ and the church.

Genesis 2, 24, right, is not speaking primarily about your wedding day.

It's not even speaking primarily about Adam and Eve's wedding day. It is speaking first and foremost about the wedding between Christ and his church.

[11 : 33] Here, I think, is where the rubber hits the road, right? That means the union between man and wife is not just a lifelong commitment between two people who love each other.

It is that. But more than that, it means that marriage, the union of husband and wife, is, or should be, a kind of miniature copy of Christ's relationship with his church.

Not the other way around, right? God doesn't take human marriage and use it as an analogy later on in the Bible for Jesus and his church. No, he takes from before the beginning of time, right, the foreordained relationship with Christ and his church and says, I am going to give you, humanity, something to reflect this.

Do you see what that means for marriage? I hope you're starting to join the dots, otherwise I've done a terrible job. So let's now come to our second big point and the big theme of this passage, what this means for husbands and wives.

Christ's relationship with his church is the blueprint for every marriage. Christ and the church is the original, the master copy that every other marriage is to be a reflection of.

[13 : 10] That means that there is a head that loves and a body that submits. Now I think we need to acknowledge, don't we, right there, that our culture is wildly out of step with God's good design.

If you take the values of our age and transpose them onto Ephesians 5, these are probably offensive words. But if we're doing that, we're starting in the wrong place.

Start with God's good plan and the glorious relationship between Christ and his church that he has wanted to make known through marriage from before the beginning of the world.

And suddenly, I hope, Ephesians 5 doesn't sound outrageous. It starts to sound so very, very good. There is a head and a body, each with different roles to play.

The Bible is very clear, right, that men and women are of equal worth, equal dignity, equal in redemption. But the Bible is also very clear that men and women have different roles.

[14 : 27] Neither is better or worse. Neither is easier or harder. Neither is more or less important. But they are different. In marriage, one is to show how wonderfully the church submits to Christ.

The other is to show how wonderfully Christ loves his church. I think it's important to see here, isn't it? No one, no one is serving themselves.

In the structure of this relationship, neither husband nor wife is profiting at the expense of the other. And that, I think, is where the big difference lies between God's good vision for marriage and the Western world's quite obviously broken vision for marriage.

If we are married to serve ourselves, we will give up on it or get frustrated by it when we stop getting what we want.

But if we are married to serve another, as God envisions marriage, then the story will be very different. That's a long run-up to verse 22, but I hope you can see now why it's so important.

[15 : 50] Between here and verse 9 of chapter 6, Paul is going to focus on various relationships within the body of Christ, beginning here with wives and husbands, saying, first of all, in verse 22, wives, submit to your husbands.

The wife submits to her head as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

Don't you see, marriage is a picture of Christ and his church. There is a head that sacrificially loves and a body that submits. That is Paul's instruction for marriage because that is God's design for marriage.

Now, again, noting, I think wives are to submit to their husbands. That's different, isn't it, from women are to submit to men.

Not to every man, not to every husband, not to anyone else's husbands, but to their husbands. This is a marriage-specific command. Stay with me, please, if that is not you, because, well, hopefully you'll see as we go on why this still matters.

[17 : 03] Because, right, this whole section of Ephesians has focused on the building up of the body, hasn't it? Chapter 4 to 6, it begins with building the body, it ends with protecting the body.

Everything here in this last part of Ephesians is for the good of the whole body of Christ. So this command in verse 22 is not given in a vacuum. It is given in the context of building up the church, of protecting the church.

And the specific role that wives have been given in that is modeling, within their own marriage, what it looks like for the church to submit to Christ.

That is, isn't it? I hope you can see. Absolutely not a kind of inferior position of any sort.

It is a high calling and a serious responsibility. I'm already imagining some objections.

[18:05] One might go like this. I'm happy to submit to Christ, but you don't know my husband.

Well, I do know your husband, at least to some degree.

I know he is not Jesus. He is a sinner. Sometimes he is unloving. Sometimes he serves himself. Sometimes he is harsh. Sometimes he is unwise. But the role of the wife, and we'll see this is true in the same way for the role of the husband in a moment, the role of the wife is not to submit to your husband when or if he loves you as you think he should.

And I think that is the hardest thing about both these commands. God says, as a wife, be like the church, even when your husband is not being like Christ.

It is not conditional. Neither, as we'll see, is the husband's love for his wife. So what does it look like to submit to your husband? Well, again, think of Christ and his church.

[19:26] Most obviously, submitting to your husband, I think, means allowing him to lead. Just as you allow Christ to lead.

Even when you're not too sure about the direction you're being led. Just as we should do with Jesus. Not trying to control things or manipulate them to go to your own way.

Not trying to set the direction yourself if you think you know better. That's not how we submit to Christ. That does not mean you cannot offer your input and be involved in a decision.

But it does mean when the direction is set by the husband who leads, perhaps in a different way from what you would have done, you follow. And you follow gladly, willingly, eagerly, because that is how the church follows Christ.

Paul puts a bit more flesh and the bones at the end of this passage when he says that wives are also to respect their husbands. I think that means think well of him.

[20:37] Speak well of him. It's so easy, is it not, to grumble about the failings of our spouse over a cup of coffee with a friend? Is that how we as the church relate to Christ?

I hope not. Submitting is to be joyful and willing. Something that you delight to do as you follow your husband, allowing him to lead, speaking well of him to others, because that, that reflects the way in which Christ's church is to submit to her head.

Now before we move on, I think it is important just to put a couple of guardrails up here. First of all, submitting to your husband does not mean sweeping sin under the carpet.

Submitting does not equal silence. And sin should always be exposed, but we saw that last week, didn't we? So if your husband is living in sin and he won't listen to you, respecting your husband does not mean letting him carry on or letting him do what he wants.

If he is living in unrepentant sin, the best thing for him and for you is that that sin comes out into the light. Secondly, you submit to Jesus first.

[22:06] So if your husband in anything leads you in a way that is away from Jesus, you do not follow.

Jesus sets the direction, godly husbands will try and lead you on the path that they are sinners. It will fall to the left and the right at times. It will not be perfect, but if he starts turning you in the other direction completely, if he tries to pull you away from church, if he tries to stop you reading God's words, if he tries to stop you spending time with God's people, you don't follow.

You follow Jesus. So wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Secondly, husbands, love your wives.

love your wives. Again, we see really clearly, don't we, how the husband's role is to reflect Christ's love for his church.

Now that might sound easy or easier at a glance. Maybe you as a wife are thinking you've got the short end of the stick here. Well, just hold on a minute. What does this love look like?

[23:25] Just read on there with me. Verse 25, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the words 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.

in the same way, husbands, love your wives. You know how Jesus gave up the glory of heaven and was born of a virgin in a stable in order to love sinners?

You know how Jesus was crucified on a cross in order to love the people who were hammering in the nails? That's the kind of love that you, husband, are to love your wife with.

And he did it all, didn't he? Not for his sake, but for her sake. Christ sacrificially loved the church and gave himself up, not so that he would get the glory, but so that she, the church, would be made beautiful.

[24 : 57] Right? Beautiful in the Bible is holiness. Sanctification. So husbands, let me ask you, do you sacrifice yourself for your wife?

So much love in our day and age is given in the hope of receiving something in return, isn't it? That is not how Christ loved the church. That is not how you are to love your wife.

Do you love your wife in such a way that does not seek your good but her goods? Perhaps the most probing question to ask, does that sacrifice lead to her sanctification?

are you loving your wife laying down yourself in a way that makes her holy?

That leads her nearer Jesus? This is not, is it? It's not about working 80 hours a week to provide a big bank account so that she can live comfortably.

[26 : 14] It's about sacrificing yourself at work so you can spend more time at home loving your wife, reading your Bible with her, praying with her, pointing her to Jesus, speaking to her about Jesus.

There's no one-size-fits-all step-by-step guide to apply this in your home but there's some obvious places to begin and I think it starts there with what we read in verse 26. How does Jesus do it?

Washes her with the word. It's a great picture, isn't it? Washing her with the word. Covering her.

That's how Christ makes the church beautiful. That is how you are to make your wife beautiful. Set aside time for her even if it's going to cost you or maybe we should say if it's not costing you anything you're not doing it right.

Give yourself up. Give up your hopes of a quiet evening watching the football and pull out your Bible with your wife. When you wake up instead of scrolling for yourself pray with your wife.

[27 : 28] Be ready to lessen your chance of a promotion at work in order to love your wife at home. Whatever it costs however you do it make sure that your purpose as a husband is making your wife beautiful in the Lord.

And again as we said before there are no if clauses here. Paul does not say love your wife when you think she deserves it.

He does not say lay down your life for your wife when you think she's earned it. It does not say make her beautiful when she wants to be made beautiful.

It says love her. Make her beautiful in the Lord. That's how Christ loved the church. Giving himself up for us when we didn't deserve anything.

That is what you are to do too. can this church look at you as a husband and see something of Christ's love for his church?

[28 : 44] In doing that you are verse 28 you are loving your own body. That's not a kind of suddenly selfish motivation. It's a spiritual necessity isn't it?

If you are not doing this you are corroding not only your wife but yourself because she is your body. You cannot in a marriage look after yourself and neglect your wife because that's neglecting you.

She is your flesh. Love her by seeking her sanctification. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. just a few more things to say before we close. As we go over here notice I think notice that all these commands are given directly to wives and to husbands to carry out their roles.

Okay it does not say does it husbands make sure your wife submits. That is her role and her responsibility. Likewise it does not say wives make sure your husband sacrificially loves you.

[30 : 04] If you walk out here this morning thinking about all the changes your spouse needs to make you've completely missed the point. You've heard this all wrong.

Maybe you do need to have an open honest conversation with one another about what this looks like in your home but every married person in here this morning should be walking out there thinking what changes do I need to make?

If you are single and you want to get married this is what you're looking for or this is what you should be aiming for.

Maybe it's not what you're looking for. There's a reason when Jesus gave his vision for marriage the disciples were aghast at how hard it sounded. Biblical marriage is not one where you fulfill your own desires but one where you put aside yourself for the sake of another and for the sake of the whole church.

And to everyone here we need to say don't we this is the kind of marriage we want and need to see flourishing in this church. Wives submitting husbands sacrificing pray for it support it encourage it hold spouses to account if they are not loving their wife or submitting to their husbands build up the body of Christ by doing what you can to build marriages that look like this you will see Christ and his church in them and they together will be able to serve the church as one it is good for marriage it is great for the church let us pray for that together before we sing our final hymn father we thank you and praise you for the way in which

[32 : 14] Jesus Christ has loved his church sacrificing himself laying down his life giving himself up in in order in order to love us even when we did not love you or we pray that we as a church would delight to submit to our head the Lord Jesus Christ and we pray for all the marriages in this congregation or that husbands would be loving their wives laying themselves down in order to sanctify her to make her beautiful in the Lord and that wives would delight to submit to their husbands father we pray all this knowing it goes so much against what the world teaches and believes but we know that this is your good design and so we thank you that you have revealed it to us for our good and your glory in Jesus name we pray amen