

The Relationship of Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our reading this morning, and we're going to be looking at various parts in Paul's letters to the Ephesians, mainly in Ephesians chapter 5, which in the Church Bibles is page 978, but I'm going to read a few little extracts beginning at chapter 3 at verse 8, just to help us get the train of thought and the context in which Paul is speaking.

First three chapters of Ephesians, as you know, lays out in such a rich way God's ultimate purpose for his people, for his church.

And at chapter 3, verse 8, Paul says this, to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized, fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord. Look down to chapter 4, verse 1.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

[1 : 3 7] That he's just been speaking about. The calling to showcase to the universe God's glory. Look at verse 17, now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, the pagans.

Look at chapter 5, verse 1, therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Verse 8 of chapter 5, at one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

And then verse 15, look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best of the time because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[3 : 0 6] And then Paul goes on to outline what that mutual submission means in three key relationships in life, in real life, in marriage, in family life with parents and children and then in work life.

But we're going to read this section about marriage. Wives, submit to your own husband as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior.

But as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 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 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.

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, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers, or this mystery is profound, that I'm speaking concerning Christ and the church.

[4 : 48] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word, and help us to understand it and apply it to our own lives. Well, if you'd turn with me to Ephesians chapter 5.

We're looking this morning at the relationship in marriage. And I'm just reminded to congratulate Abraham and Sarai, who have just got engaged to be married, so well done.

Now, there are three passages in the New Testament only that address commands specifically to husbands and wives. Ephesians 5, where we read Colossians 3, verse 18 and following, which is very similar, but less detailed.

And, of course, 1 Peter chapter 3 that we studied recently. And each of these passages begins with the words, wives, submit to your husbands. In my old 1940s Church of Scotland book of common order, Ephesians 5 is the first reading that is set, and it forms the very heart of the marriage service.

[6 : 21] In 1999, the Joint Liturgical Commission of Great Britain produced a marriage service book for use by all the denominations. And it totally omits any mention, any reference to any of these three readings.

The only ones in the Bible actually addressed the spouses. I think that simple fact illustrates eloquently the influence of secular feminism, not only on our culture, but also on the church since the second half of the 20th century.

Maybe you felt a bit uncomfortable when we read those words in Ephesians 5 this morning. Certainly, I noticed that when I read these words at weddings, you get titters going around.

That's at best. Perhaps often you get tutting. And you get certainly some faces looking very angry indeed. Well, is that how we feel when we read these verses?

If so, I think we need to be careful that we're not putting ourselves at the heart of the universe, banishing God to the periphery, when we think about this relationship of marriage.

[7 : 33] Because marriage, as we've said, is not an end in itself. Marriage exists to serve the glory of God in the kingdom of Christ. And unless we think about it in its proper way, we're going to get into all sorts of confusion about marriage in general, but also in our own marriages in particular, if we ourselves are married or if we one day will be.

The Bible plainly teaches us that the purpose of marriage, indeed the ultimate purpose of our whole salvation in Christ, is what determines the pattern of godly marriages.

And Ephesians is a letter that makes it very, very clear indeed for us, because it's in the context of explaining God's ultimate purpose in salvation that we are given the ultimate pattern for marriage.

So I want to look at this teaching this morning. And first of all, I want us to be clear what this whole letter teaches us about God's ultimate purpose in salvation.

And it is nothing less than what I would call the recreation through redemption of perfect harmony in the whole cosmos, in the whole created order.

[8 : 49] Ephesians is just full of the ultimate purpose of salvation, and it has a great future focus. Of course, it tells us what we're saved from, chapter 2, verse 1, once you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

But there is a far greater emphasis on what is now true and what will still yet become true for God's redeemed people. Look at chapter 2, verse 6. The argument really begins in verse 4, where it says, But God, but God, but God, verse 6, has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that, notice, so that in the coming ages he might show or showcase the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

Look down to verse 10. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

You see, that is what we are saved for. That is the purpose of it all. Look back to chapter 1, verse 10. This is God's plan. He says, for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth.

You see, the gospel of redemption is about the recreation of total harmony in God's created order, in heaven, in the spiritual realm, and on earth, in the world of humanity.

[10 : 25] It's the total reversal of the cosmic disaster of man's rebellion that cursed the whole cosmos at the beginning, and that cursed all the relationships in this world.

And redemption is the reunification into proper order of all creation, so that it would be as God created it to be and has promised that it will be through his great salvation.

A world in perfect harmony where everything and everyone is in perfect relationship and perfectly working together for the goal of it all, which is the glory of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why all through Ephesians, there is this great emphasis on oneness. Perhaps you noticed when we read, but in chapter 2, it's all about Jew and Gentile, isn't it? All humanity has one new man in Christ Jesus.

A new society that Paul says is being built together to become a dwelling place for God's spirit. And then in chapter 3, Paul the Jew is speaking all about his mission to the Gentiles, so that the Gentiles will be one with the Jews, and that through this, through the united harmony of one church, chapter 3, verse 10 that we read, through that, God's manifold wisdom will be displayed to all the hosts of heaven, to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

[11 : 57] That is the total reversal of all humanity's rivalry and strife. Just think of the news at the moment. But brought into harmony in Christ.

And that displays unmistakably the reversal of all the rebellion and the sin that has destroyed and disrupted this world. And that is the calling.

That is the ultimate purpose of Christ's church for all eternity. And therefore, as we read in chapter 4, verse 1, we are to walk now in a manner that is worthy of that calling.

That's what he's talking about in chapter 5. Walk in love, chapter 5, verse 2. Walk in the light, verse 8. Because we are now light in the Lord.

Walk in wisdom, chapter 5, verse 15. In understanding what God's will is for us, verse 17. In other words, what he's saying is that we are to live in every aspect of our lives and in every earthly relationship now so as to demonstrate this recreation harmony that God has wrought in Christ Jesus.

[13 : 10] So we are not any longer to be walking in the fallen ways of this fallen world. No longer, verse 17 of chapter 4, no longer as the pagans do in the futility of their minds.

No, we are to be imitators of God. We are beloved children of his and therefore we are to walk as children of light. That is as chapter 5, verse 18 says, we are to walk filled with the spirit.

Now don't misunderstand. We are filled with the spirit. We are children of light. That's a fact for Christians. Paul says in chapter 1 that we are filled, we were sealed with the spirit when we believed.

He says in chapter 4, verse 30 that we were sealed with the spirit for the day of redemption. That is our fact in Christ Jesus, the moment that we believed. But therefore, he says, because that is true, we're not to grieve the spirit of God.

We're not to grieve him by living as though that were not true. We are to be filled with the spirit. In other words, we are to be the people we really are. We are to walk worthy of our calling.

[14 : 22] But notice that when Paul talks about the evidence of this spirit-filled living, he's not talking about some sort of ecstatic experience.

He's not talking about what we feel. He's talking about what we do. How we behave. You walk in love.

Look at chapter 5, verse 19. This is what it means to be filled with the spirit. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In other words, encouraging one another in gospel truth, even in our song.

Of course, it means our songs must say something worthwhile, mustn't they? Singing and giving thanks to God, verse 20, with all our heart. So spirit-filled Christians are thankful people all of the time.

Not disgruntled people, not grumbling people. And notice verse 21. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[15 : 29] And it's this last thing, this harmonious mutual submission within our relationships that Paul takes up and explains more fully in the whole of the rest of this section, right down to chapter 6, verse 9.

And he feels the need to apply this aspect of a spirit-filled life before the conclusion of his letter. A conclusion, by the way, which is all about the real spiritual struggle with the powers of darkness that we all face.

And I think that is no accident. Because these verses about submitting are all about the very real, down-to-earth, day-to-day arena of life where the real spiritual battles are played out in our lives.

That's where the spiritual battle rages, isn't it? It's in our day-to-day lives. It's in rubbing shoulders with one another, in our relationships. Husbands and wives, parents and children. And masters and servants.

That's where the spiritual life needs to be in evidence. That's where the rubber hits the road in life, isn't it? It's not when we're singing in church and everyone's smiling. It's when you go out on Monday morning.

[16 : 41] It's in the midst of real-life work. It's in the reality of stress and strain in the family. That's where we demonstrate, and must demonstrate, the recreation harmony of God's new society.

And that's where we're showing, or must be showing, that all things in heaven and on earth are God's workmanship. To show forth what he has created us for, forever.

So this is where we are to show that all things in heaven and on earth are being united in Christ. We all are to submit to God's ordering of our sinful world.

And we're to demonstrate that harmony in all our relationships in life. That's our calling as the church. And we're to show our submission to Christ as Lord by submitting to his ordering of relationships, not ours.

And the first thing Paul has in his list is marriage. Look at verse 21 of chapter 5. It's a hinge verse. In our ESV Bibles, verse 22 begins a new paragraph with a heading.

[17 : 54] It rather breaks the connection. But in fact, verse 21 is the heading that governs each of the three examples that follow the wives and husbands, the parents and children, and the servants and masters.

And immediately, I think that shows us that some of the feminist exegetes who interpret this verse differently, they just can't stand.

See, they read verse 22 where it said, Wives, submit to your own husbands. But they say, well, verse 21 says, Submit to one another. So all that means is that wives are to submit to husbands, and husbands are likewise to submit to wives in exactly the same way.

In fact, not only is that illogical, it just does not square with the text in front of us. The three examples that Paul gives of mutual submission are clearly parallel.

And each of these examples shows a relationship that is complementary, not one that is absolutely reciprocal. Each side has its own specific command.

[19 : 01] You can see that. Parents are not commanded to obey their children, as children are to their parents. There is a command to fathers, Do not provoke your children.

But that's different. It's complementary, isn't it? It's not the same. When you get to verse 21, it says, Submit to one another. It doesn't therefore mean that you're having to do this in exactly the same way.

It simply means that you must submit to whom you ought to submit in God's rightly ordered pattern. That's what it's saying. Now, Colossians 3, verse 13, don't look it up.

It uses exactly the same language in a slightly different context. Paul is talking there about bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving one another.

And obviously, forgiving one another doesn't mean that both parties do the forgiving. Of course not. It's the wronged party who forgives, and the other one graciously receives that forgiveness.

[20 : 08] That's what forgiving one another means. It's mutual forgiveness. It's complementary, not identical. That's just the way it is here. What submitting to one another means is spelled out in terms of what that means in each of these three relationships that follows.

It's the appropriate role and the appropriate actions for each partner that are spelled out in that relationship. So there is mutuality. Of course there is.

That is what verse 21 implies. It is not, it is not a relationship of dominance, one over the other. Nor is it a relationship of independence, one from the other.

But it is a relationship of interdependence, the one with the other. In the rightly ordered oneness of creation through redemption in Christ.

I don't lose sight of that. All of this about marriage is set in the context of the oneness, of the harmony of all created relationships in Christ.

[21 : 19] Of all these relationships that serve the purpose of God that God purposed in Christ before the foundation of the world. And we are to serve that eternal purpose.

That's what Paul has put at the very heart of this letter to the Ephesians. That we should be, he says, to the praise of his glorious grace. That's the ultimate purpose of our salvation in Christ.

Therefore that is the ultimate purpose of our marriages, indeed of all marriages. So how then is the pattern of marriage to bear witness to and to demonstrate God's ultimate purpose for marriage in the recreated harmony of all relationships in his kingdom?

How are we to walk worthily of our calling in true Christian marriage? Walking not as the pagans, not in darkness, but in wisdom as children of light.

Well, that is what verses 22 to 33 tell us. By clear commands to both wives and husbands. Paul's speaking here about the ultimate pattern for marriage.

[22 : 31] And it is marriage that demonstrates recreation through redemption in Christ. I want us to focus now on these verses very specifically. And notice, first of all, by the way, that he is speaking here about marriage as a partnership in serving God.

He's not speaking generally just about men and women in society. And notice in verse 22, women are not commanded to submit to men generally.

Wives submit to their own husbands, not everybody else's husbands. All right? But there are two clear commands here, one to husbands and one to wives. And I want to summarize them in this way.

Wives, says Paul, you are to be the helpers that God created you and indeed redeemed you to be in your marriages. And husbands, we are to be the heads that God created us and redeemed us to be in our marriages.

That's all there is to it, really. But let's be very clear what that does mean and what that does not mean. First of all, wives. Wives, be the helpers that God created and redeemed you to be.

[23 : 45] Verse 22, wives, submit to your own husbands. And in case you think that is just a misprint, it says the same thing in verse 24 to round off the paragraph and adds, in everything, wives should submit in everything to their own husbands.

Now that is the general pattern that Paul is laying out for the marriage relationship. That word submit has really, as its root meaning, the sense of good order.

And to submit means to subject yourself to the right and proper good order of God. This state of affairs is God's ordering for marriage.

God's ordering as opposed to the chaos and to the rivalry of non-submission. The image really, I think, is that of a team where the husband is the captain of the team.

Now that does not mean, does it, the captain is the star of the team. Very often that's not the case. Sometimes a rugby team captain is a prop forward. They don't very often score goals. They don't kick goals.

[25 : 00] Joey Wilkinson happened yesterday to be the captain of Toulon when he was the star of his last game in Britain and they won the Heineken Cup. But for most of his playing career he was not the captain, was he, when he won the World Cup for England with that great kick?

He was the star but he wasn't the captain. You can't even remember who the captain was. So it doesn't mean that the husband is the star of the team but it does mean that he carries the can when the chips are down.

It does mean that he bears the final responsibility on his shoulders as any team leader does. And therefore it means that he must have that final say.

That doesn't mean he will never take advice or listen to his wife. He would be a fool if that was the case. But many people, many women I suppose, still rail against this idea of submitting.

So let's be clear about the rationale that Paul gives for this command. First of all, the question why? Why should wives submit? Well, Paul gives two reasons. First, because this is God's order for creation in order that marriage might serve and glorify his kingdom.

[26 : 15] Look at verse 23. For the husband is the head of the wife. Now he's taking us right back to Genesis and the purpose of man's creation as male and female in the beginning.

Remember that God created man to serve his kingdom and to rule it and have dominion over all creation. but the male of the species proved inadequate on his own. Amen, say all the women here.

Well, it's true. And so God created Eve for Adam to be the suitable complementary helper that he needed. Not just wanted, but needed.

Adam came first as leader, as captain of the team, then Eve as helper. Equal. Yes, indeed. Equal in status and dignity. That's the whole point.

She was not just an animal. None of the animals were suitable. She was of his own flesh. But not equal in function. She complements him and therefore completes him.

[27 : 20] And that is God's ordering to make the marriage team prosper. But of course, read on and you find Genesis chapter 3 ruins all of that.

What happens? Well, Eve sought to be the leader of the team. And Adam abdicated his responsibility and his leadership. And what happened?

That led to disaster. And you read in Genesis 3.16 of the curse that perpetuates that disordered relationship. The woman's desire, says God, will be for your husband to try and rule over him.

But no, says God, he will rule over you because that is the right order. But your sin will now make that whole relationship unharmonious so much of the time.

Well, that explains, doesn't it, the unharmonious nature of the battle of the sexes to this day. Not harmonious interdependence, but so often disharmonious rivalry.

[28 : 22] Rivalry. Wives, not submitting, but seeking to lead, and husbands, very often not leading, and rather feebly disengaging from the marriage team.

That is the way of the pagan world. But not so with you, says Paul. We in the church are to display the new creation way of restored harmony. Wives, be the helpers that God created you to be.

That's how you will serve the kingdom and not oppose it. It's God's created pattern. But secondly, Paul says, the reason is you are to submit because this is also God's pattern in redemption.

Verse 23, for the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church, his body. Our marriage, he says, reflects the great marriage between Christ and his church.

church. And when the New Testament speaks of Christ as the head over all things, it's quite clearly speaking of his rightful authority, his preeminence.

[29 : 30] If you look back to chapter 1, verse 22 of Ephesians, you'll see that by head over all things, he means that all things are under his feet, that he is the absolute ruler.

But notice in chapter 1, verse 22, there's also another sense in which Christ is head because the Bible says he is head for the church or to the church.

That is, the church, his body, is enabled to enter into its destiny of dominion and rule in the heavenly realms because and only because Christ is the head for us.

that's how we are raised up and seated with him in the heavenly realms in Christ. Christ's headship for his church is the source of rich blessing.

Christ's headship of his church is the conduit of our destiny and our salvation. Rich blessings flow from the head to the whole body so that the body grows and reaches its destiny in Christ.

[30 : 36] That's the message of Ephesians chapter 4. And it's just that same sense too in which the husband is also to be the head of the wife.

He is to be the leader into blessing and into fulfillment in God's service for his wife. And so in the light of that in chapter 5 verse 24 as the church submits to Christ gladly and joyfully to be led into blessing so wives are to submit to their husbands.

He doesn't say does he husbands forcefully subjugate your wives? Not at all. But wives voluntarily submit to God's appointed way of blessing.

And that's why we're to submit wives because it's God's pattern in redemption. It's his appointed way of blessing for your destiny. But what does that mean?

How how are wives to submit? Well look at verse 22 again. Paul says submit as to the Lord.

[31 : 51] You see he's saying submission is a privilege because it's not for your husband's sake it's for the Lord's sake that you're doing it. And maybe that's a help to you sometimes. It's not whether your husband deserves your willing submission.

Very often he doesn't I'm sure. The question is whether Christ deserves your submission to his pattern to his command. But it is a privilege and it's not in any way implying something demeaning for you as a wife.

It's not implying any inequality in status or any loss of dignity. Absolutely the opposite. It's part of your submission to God's way.

And that is a mark of being filled with the Spirit of God. In Romans chapter 8 Paul says the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God.

It does not submit to God's law. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if Christ's Spirit lives in you. And his Spirit values and rejoices in submission to his head.

[33 : 00] We don't have time to look at it in detail now but in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul speaks of the head of every man being Christ and the head of every wife being her husband and the head of Christ is God God the Father.

Well Christ is equal with God he is God. There's no question of an inferior status of Christ the Son and yet he too has a head the Father.

And you read in 1 Corinthians 15 that the climax of the whole of the great story of redemption comes when Christ puts himself into subjection under his head God the Father.

Jesus Christ delights to deliver the kingdom his own kingdom to God the Father. Everything is his but he rejoices to subject himself to his head his heavenly Father.

You see Jesus is an example he is the ultimate pattern for submission in marriage. He submits to God's perfect order in creation and redemption and that is the pattern of great blessing for us too.

[34 : 18] It's joyful surrender it's voluntary surrender in order to serve the glory of the kingdom of Christ. And Paul says that is the high calling of a Christian wife.

Submit to your head your husband for the Lord for his sake. The greatest the deepest the most dignified fulfilling of your destiny is to be the helper that God created you to be and redeemed you to be in your marriage team.

And that's the truth if you're a married woman. That way you might be in your marriage to the praise of his glorious grace in everything you do. It's that pattern that serves God's ultimate purpose for you.

Now I ask the wives here is that a demeaning calling to share in the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ in that way. Surely that can't be, can it?

How could it be? It's the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. But husbands wake up because having addressed 45 words to wives Paul now addresses 115 words to husbands.

[35 : 39] Husbands he says you be the head that God created and redeemed you to be. At this point your wife is very probably thinking that's all very well to talk about joyful submission to husbands emulating Christ's submission.

But my husband isn't like Jesus and that's true. So we better listen up husbands because we might be surprised actually at what's coming next.

I think many, many men in Ephesus when they first heard these words read out would have been very surprised at what came next. They would be expecting wives submit to your husbands husbands keep your wives in submission.

That would have been typical wouldn't it of the culture of the day. That would be typical of many macho and chauvinistic cultures still in many places in the world today. I venture that plenty of men the world over are very happy with verse 22 of Ephesians 5.

Wives submit very happy to insist on that. But friends if we think that we're very very wrong. We think in that way we're so wrong that it just shows why the feminist movement had to grow up in the first place.

[37 : 00] It had to because of the chauvinism of that kind which is utterly unbiblical which is utterly unchristian. Men we need to listen.

What is our part as husbands? Look at verse 25. Not rule your wives. Not disregard your wives.

Not lord it over your wives and treat them as domestic help by day and call girls by night. Not any of those things. What does it say? Husbands love your wives.

That's what headship means in marriage. That's the husband's part in the mutual submission that serves the kingdom of Christ. Well that's not too difficult I suppose most of us think well we do love our wives give them flowers every now and again give them a cuddle now and again and say nice things maybe compliment them on their new hairdo or clothes or whatever heaven sometimes we even empty the dishwasher there's love probably only if there's no glasses left in the cupboard and we've got blokes coming around to watch the football and we need some but we do occasionally do it so I think we probably come up all right we do love our wives no no no says Paul I'm going to have to really explain this to you because most of you men just don't get it all the time or even any of the time that's what Paul's doing in these verses that follow he's teaching us what it really means to love your wives and it's quite a shock first he focuses on the pattern of our headship as husbands verse 25 love as

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her in case we haven't got clear what that giving up means look back to verse 2 Christ gave himself up as an offering as a sacrifice to God a painful crucifixion you get that men we are to love our wives with self giving self sacrificing self crucifying love that costs everything being head means giving up everything for the sake of your wife in utter self denial that's rather a blow to the chauvinistic ego listen to C.S.

[39 : 30] Lewis again from his book the four loves this headship then is most fully embraced not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion whose wife receives most and gives least is most unworthy of him is in her own mere nature least lovable the chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of a man's marriage but in its sorrows in the sickness and suffering of a good wife and in the faults of a bad one in his unwearying never paraded care or his inexhaustible forgiveness that's what real headship is about according to the bible loving as christ the real man loved his church giving up everything for her it's the team captain isn't it that shoulders everything when the chips are down it's the team captain that bears it when the team is up against it so men is that how we are loving our wives

I wonder if we really are I wonder if perhaps that's why many women many wives find it very hard to bear the command to submit because we're not doing that C.S.

Lewis goes on to say that no feminist should ever grudge the husband this crown of headship because it isn't a crown of gold it's a crown of thorns and then he says so very penetratingly the real danger is not that husbands may grasp this crown too eagerly but that they will allow or compel their wives to usurp it isn't that true who is the real burden bearer in most marriages men is it us who really bears the cross who suffers the loss who is it who is giving themselves up for the marriage for the family for the home come on men says Paul love your wives as Christ loved the church that's the pattern of real headship in marriage but there's more verses 26 to 28 speak clearly about the purpose of that headship Christ sacrificed himself that he might bring his body the church into its

God ordained destiny to present it holy and in splendor and radiant glory forever that's what verses 26 and 27 say and so says verse 28 in the same way husbands you should love your wives as your own bodies we're to sacrifice everything about ourselves in order to love our wives in such a way as to bring them into their personal destiny of splendor and glory forever in Christ that's the purpose of your love for your wife if you're a married man if you're the head it's not about your self fulfillment it's about her fulfillment it's about the full flowering of your wife in holiness and grace and glory in Jesus Christ now husbands is that ever even on our minds let alone in our thinking about headship and marriage but that is the purpose of a truly

Christ like loving headship in marriage according to Paul and thirdly Paul goes on to add real persuasion to his command to love this way as Christ life heads look at verse 28 the end of it to verse 32 not only can our wives only attain their true destiny in Christ through our loving of them this way the same is true for ourselves he says he who loves his wife loves himself no one hates his own flesh verse 29 he looks after it he nourishes it so it grows and develops but marriage he says in verse 31 has united husband and wife into one flesh and that means you cannot grow your own spiritual destiny without your wife growing into hers because you one but she can't grow unless you are the head for her that Christ wants you to be unless you will lead her into that destiny and there's something very profound about all this

[44 : 16] Paul says that plainly in verse 32 it's a mystery it doesn't mean in the sense of it being incomprehensible but rather it's a wonderful and a glorious thing now made known by God in the gospel that's what mystery means all through this letter it's unsearchable riches that have been hidden and now brought to light and the wonder is that our marriages in their one flesh union they reflect the union of Christ with his church and what he's saying is we can therefore only grow individually in Christ if we grow together in him that was the whole point of Ephesians chapter 4 that Edward was preaching on a couple of weeks ago chapter 4 verse 15 says we grow up into him who is the head Christ and from him the whole body the whole church grows as each part does its work and he's saying here it's just the same in marriage growth towards our destiny in

Christ happens only when each part works properly when each partner works harmoniously wives helping not hindering and husbands leading with love real love sacrificial love cross shaped love therefore together you grow into your true destiny in Christ he who loves him his wife loves himself says Paul to that end but if you don't love your wife then you damage not only your wife but yourself that's what it means to be one flesh if one spine hurts well so does the other just like the church where one body if one part hurts so does the other if one is blessed so will the other be friends do you see what a wonderful and beautiful pattern of partnership this really is there's not a sniff is there of ugly male chauvinism about it not at all it's the very opposite and any man who stresses the idea of authority or who thinks in terms of subjugating his wife that is a hundred miles away from the

Bible's pattern here any woman who would deny and resist this true pattern of Christ like headship in terms of godly leadership into a radiant destiny in Christ well she too is miles and miles away for God's great purpose for her love love but when a Christian couple does embrace gladly marriage like this then not only will it be for their greatest blessing and furthering of their eternal destiny in Christ it also manifestly serves the kingdom in so many other ways too blesses them it leads their family harmoniously in Christ but something of the beauty and the pattern of the glory of Christ will also shine forth into the world both on earth and even in heaven says Paul it will be marriage that is to the praise of his glorious grace it will be marriage that showcases the purpose of God in creation and in recreation through redemption it will be marriage that preaches the gospel of grace in a visible way how desperately our world needs to see that in real

Christian marriages chapter 4 verse 18 Paul reminds us that our world is darkened in understanding alienated from the life of God because of ignorance hard hearted callous given up to sensuality that is so often the features of our relationships in life even in marriages today but marriage for God that speaks of real love of real commitment of real sacrifice all for one glorious purpose in Christ that will shine light into the darkness of this dark world just by being this way Christian marriage will preach the grace and the mercy of God and the promise of God in Christ to all who likewise will embrace him and that says Paul is what every Christian married couple are called to look at verse 33 at the end let each one of you love like this husbands love like this like

Christ wives respect submit for Christ each one not just some not just not just some show marriages not just those marriages that seem to be naturally easy relationships although I doubt really if there are any of those in reality but all of us says Paul the whole body of the church grows as each part does its work so also the witness of real marriage needs each marriage to do its work and shine not just thinking this way but doing it this way everyone that's hard isn't it it's hard because we're fallen creatures we're not yet liberated from sin's presence but you remember Ephesians 4 verse 7 grace is given to each one of us God commands us to walk worthily of our calling but when he commands he gives grace to obey God's commands are his enablings we must obey him but by his grace we can obey him so let each one walk worthily in our marriages let everyone encourage marriage in others that reflects this ultimate pattern wives being the helpers

[50 : 19] God made you to be and redeemed you to be it'll be hard at times sometimes it'll be very frustrating you may have to help your husband to be the leader God has called him to be sometimes that will be very hard sometimes very painful you'll need to remember it's not for your husband primarily it's for the Lord and he does give grace husbands being the heads being the leaders that God has made us to be and redeemed us to be the prime responsibility is ours if they're wrong patterns and damaging patterns in our marriage ours and sometimes there is just chauvinism boorishness among men even Christian men even in evangelical churches yes there is that needs to be repented of and utterly departed from men but more often

I think there is just wimpish and lazy abdication of responsibility from men that is how we are by nature men just retreating into a comfortable world of work or the newspapers or sport or the pub or the computer or whatever else it is leaving all the real yoke of responsibility on our wives or we get on with loving ourselves well let each one love his wife as himself says Paul because that's the only love that will lead either of you to your true destiny in Christ so men are you loving your wives are you are you and I worked in London most Monday mornings Dick Lucas used to come into my office to discuss the weekend and nearly every week he said this to me are you loving your wife and I used to get quite cross and annoyed because he said it so often and so repeatedly but the truth was

I needed to hear it and so do you listen to God's command do do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God says Paul so then let each one of you love his wife as himself and that is what will motivate any wife to see to it that she respects her husband amen let's pray together just a moment of silence as we ponder these words let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband heavenly father how we need your commands that arrest us that probe us yes that expose us deep in our hearts we sit here this morning thankful that few see into the reality of our own personal relationships and that none see deeply into the thoughts of our own hearts but we acknowledge that we are as an open book before you that you see and that you know thank you heavenly father for your commands which though penetrating are not to destroy but are to heal and to restore to call to repentance to call to newness of life to change to growth to lead us into the destiny of the way everlasting help us everyone here this morning who is married to read and to mark and to learn to inwardly digest all that you have said to us that our marriages might be to the praise of his glorious grace and to everyone here whether married or not we ask that you would help us to be a people committed gladly and with joy to honoring marriage among all to helping and strengthening relationships that will showcase the glory of Christ the love of Christ who gave himself for his church that this world might see in us however faint it may be the glorious light and love of our Savior himself so help us we pray and lead us for Jesus sake amen