

Christian Marriage  
Ephesians 5:22-33

Matthew 6:19-34

John 15

Responsive Psalms 34:11-19

This morning's text can be seen as controversial, especially to the modern mind. That's right, this morning we are going to be diving in to Paul's teaching on marriage. But before we dive into this controversy we must remember what Paul has been talking about, which shouldn't be too difficult since we have been hammering on it quite a bit over the past few weeks. This teaching on marriage doesn't exist in a vacuum here, but is rather built upon all the things that Paul has been saying up until this point, which has been primarily focused upon unity in the body of Christ, what that should look like, and how to achieve it. There is quite the exhortation from Paul to find peace between our brothers and sisters in Christ, to be quick to seek forgiveness, and quick to forgive. We are to serve one another in Christ having a preference for one another in brotherly love, remembering that we are each a part of the body of Christ and as Paul wrote in chapter 4:1 "I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling of which you have been called, with all lowliness, gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." This applies to our text today as well, remembering this call to conduct ourselves in this manner.

We are not to be haughty, prideful, or arrogant, but to seek peace with one another by putting one another above ourselves. What Paul is really getting at here, is that we are to put the needs of another over the ambitions and needs of ourselves. This is a sacrificial living, giving of one self in such a way that it seeks the betterment of all of those around us. The effect of this, if each and every member is accomplishing this as intended, it creates a culture of mutual sacrifice, and mutual building up of one another. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and God has built us up together in such a way that we accompany one another, it is this way in the church with each being a member of the body, each individually having a role to fulfill for the benefit of the whole, as it is also likewise in the believers' marriage.

So we are to strive to build up that unity, to see one another as a member of this same body, as members of the body of Christ, and this principle also carries into our text this morning, speaking on marriage. Another application we can make here that Paul has been building upon is in chapter 5, "be imitators of God, and walk in love as Christ has also loved us and gave of himself for us." So we have the unity of this one body, in Christ, of which we who are believers are all members, and we are to imitate him by living in such a way that we seek and strive to benefit one another sacrificing ourselves for one another, building one another up and not being a stumbling block, or an offense but rather in all humbleness care for and love one another. So let's keep all these things in mind this morning as we are reading our text for I believe that this is the context in which Paul's instruction for the husbands and wives in a marriage relationship rests. It is a narrowing down, giving first a broad overview of the body of Christ and our roles as members of it, then our individual responsibilities in each of those roles to benefit one another, which is then narrowed down again into focusing upon the personal and intimate relationship between a believing husband and wife. We must understand that this instruction is again written to those who are in Christ, for the standards set by God have little importance or weight to those who are outside of Christ. Likewise as we have also talked about in the past few weeks, we who are of this one body, have been given the spirit who works in us that which is necessary to maintain this sort of unity we are called to.

So the other thing to keep in mind that is that Paul is writing to believers here, a people of the spirit of God, who by conviction and instruction of that spirit are able to live in such a manner. This concept of mutual sacrifice is foolishness to the world, as the world seeks to gain and glorify self, it seems to be one of the unspoken rules of society is that everything is a sacrifice for the ambitions and desires of the individual. Nothing matters more than what gets me what I want, or gets me ahead in this life but as we see in this instruction from Paul about the church, about our interpersonal relationships with one another, and in our text this morning about the marriage relationship this could not be any further from the truth. What we are called to be as Christians is by nature counter culture, and it goes against our own human nature at times to give of ourselves as we have been called. So let us go ahead and read our text this morning keeping all this in mind. Starting this morning at verse 15 ( read 15-33 )

So now is where the fun begins, we dive into this controversial passage about submission, love and sacrifice. We must not isolate this passage and make it something that it is not, we must see it through the larger lens of what Paul has been saying this entire time, he ends his instruction to individuals within the body of Christ in verse 21, calling for each to submit to one another in the lord. This concept of submission can be a difficult one for us, for again it is against our human nature to submit, why to children disobey parents, it is human nature to rebel, but we who are Christs are called to submit to him, and disobeying parents is listed as a rebellious sinful action for it mirrors our own rebellion against God. This whole section of submitting to one another, sacrificing for one another is all understood through verse 1 of chapter 5, be imitators of Christ. Christ submitted to the cross, he was sent to do his fathers will and willingly laid down his life to that purpose, the ultimate sacrifice was given so that those whom he loves may be brought near.

This was an ultimate act of submission and sacrifice, this was the ultimate act of putting the needs of another over ones self, through Christs death we have all been forgiven, without this sacrifice we would still all be dead in our own sins. This is what it means to imitate Christ, as Paul says is our example, the one who gave of himself because of his love for us. Our society is all about sacrifice if it is beneficial to ourselves, as I stated before the mindset of the world is that all things are a worthy sacrifice for our own gain and glory..but when you are the one called to sacrifice that is another story. Likewise with submission, the world loves the idea of submission, as long as it is others submitting to us. By nature there is a hierarchy of submission, as citizens of this country we are subject to the laws of the land, submissive to those who make them, and those who enforce them. This creates order, promotes peace, and fosters security and safety. It is the same at work, as employees we submit to the rules and regulations of our employer, this creates order and efficiency, so that the job that needs to be done can be accomplished. And generally this is a widely accepted reality, but when the bible says, “wives submit yourselves to your husbands” well, that's when a lot of people start to complain.

There are those who seek to soften this passage, they ask the question...did Paul really mean that? Or they will attack Paul and say, who is he, never been married to be giving marriage advice? But the truth is, it is right there undeniably in the text, written by an Apostle, who was a major contributor to the written word of God. So we can't second guess, or try to smooth over what is being said to try to make it more acceptable to our modern minds, we must deal with the text and what is being said. The first thing I will say here, is that this word used is submit...it is not obey. Sadly there are many who interpret this passage as the wife being the servant of the husband, but that is not what Paul is saying here at all. Submission is voluntary, and it is a sign of affection, love, and trust.

The example of submission we have in Christ is him laying down his life for us. He had the power to avoid everything he went through, he could have chose to not go through with it...but he submitted to the will of the father who sent him, so that the salvation of God's children could be accomplished. Submission is not slavery, it is a willingness to give of oneself and the driving force behind it is the love for the husband. Over the past few weeks we have been talking a lot about unity within the church, within the body of Christ, and the same principles apply here in the marriage relationship. There is a need for sacrifice, and for laying down ones life for the other to build up that unity. One of the biggest killers of a marriage is self, if you see your spouse as something that you can use to gain what you want, then you are looking at the relationship all wrong. For marriage to work, just like in the local church body relationships, we must not be driving by our own selfish desires, but instead seek to build up one another in love and the wife's role as written in scripture, is to be the support, the helper, and that takes a submissive heart willing to lay down ones own desires for the betterment of their spouse, and of the family unit.

But again this does not mean servant or slave, and husbands...lets be honest, we often don't make it easy for our wives to fulfill this. Sadly it is all to common that the husband lords this authority over his wife, and much of the biblical consoling tells the wife..well that is how God made him and you have been made by God to be submissive to him. There has been much abuse justified in this sort of mindset, and the big problem with much of this is the weight is put disproportionately upon the woman's service, and little is talked about the husbands requirement in this relationship. There is an element of mutual sacrifice, of mutual service born out of the love that each have for one another. The goal in the Christian marriage is to see both partners flourish, not one being crushed under the heal of the other in some idea of servitude which sadly happens all to often in the Christian relationships, built largely upon a miss understanding, and uneven focus of this passage.

The reality of this passage is there is a mutual sacrifice going on, and a mutual serving, though they may take on different forms, or appear different at the heart they are the same. It is caring for the needs of the spouse in mutual beneficial ways. Just because there is difference doesn't make one better then another, just like in the church body we each have a role to play, some are arms that do the heavy lifting, some are feet that carry the message, it is the same in the Christian household. God has given both the husband and the wife roles to fulfill, neither one more, or less important then the other and it is designed to be mutually beneficial and to build a stronger family unit as each look to the benefit of the other. Wives are told to submit to their husbands, in love, as unto the Lord. And look what Paul says husbands are to do..verse 25 "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her." You want to talk about submission, husbands..you are called to lay down your lives for your wives. Christ died for the church, and this is the comparison that Paul uses for your role as a husband.

Christ saw the church as more important then his own life, he knew that to reconcile her that he must die, his blood must be shed so that the church may live. And this is what I meant by there has been so much wrong committed under a misunderstanding of this passage. For far to long the Christian community focused upon a serventhood of the wife, when the bible states that the husband is to lay down his own life for his wife. The Christian marriage is a mutual servant hood, but both in different ways as God has created both male and female for compatible roles within the bonds of marriage. Each having their own strengths and weakness of which we are to be fitted together as a balancing act to make the one unit stronger. Unbalance happens when one seeks to usurp that order, and seeks the betterment of self over the other.

A healthy biblical marriage is a marriage of mutual sacrifice, of giving of self for the benefit of the union, and this reaches into every aspect of a life shared together. Though the giving of self in the marriage may look different for each spouse, it does not change the reality of its necessity. As believers we are to imitate Christ, as Paul has been showing throughout these past few chapters the key element of this imitation is a sacrificial love, and this is something that he challenges each and every believer to do toward one another, how much more so in our relationship with our own spouse. In chapter 4 Paul said that we who are Christs, are all a part of one body, each members with our roles and purposes, its even more so in marriage, Verse 28 “So husbands ought to love their own 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 the Lord does the church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be jointed to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Paul has sort of been building up, starting with are unity as a community of fellow believers, and what that should look like. Then taking those principles and zooming in a bit more as to how it should effect our marriage relationship, built upon mutual sacrifice in love, and all of this ends in the lesson of our relationship with Christ. Its like taking a satellite view of the earth, then zooming in onto a neighborhood, then zooming onto the head of a coin. The real focus is our unity in the body of Christ and being knit together with him and how that effects our life, our friendships, our marriage because it is built first upon the unity we have in Christ. And Paul is using this marriage relationship to teach a truth and reality of Christ, as he says in verse 32, “This is a great mystery but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. There are parallels to be drawn from our union with Christ, our union together in Christ, and our union in marriage with our spouses. All of these things form a picture of who Christ is and informs our understanding of our relationship with him.

Christ is the one who gave all for us, as we know, and believe he died so that we who are his children may live. Giving of one self in such a way is the ultimate form of sacrifice, not only to die for another, but to knowingly lay down ones own life to suffer and die in such a brutal way because his love for us was greater then his suffering. Husbands, this is the standard by which we are being held to love our wives...to lay down our lives for them. As scripture tells us, there is no greater love, and no greater sacrifice then this, that a man lay down his life for another. I believe that the reality of a biblical Christian marriage is a marriage where each spouse tries to out sacrifice on another. So many want to say marriage is 50/50, or the real coy ones will say, 60/40 but really it is about giving your spouse your all, and they likewise in return give you their all. Christ gave us his all, leaving his glory to take on flesh, to live among us in this sin sick world so that he could reconcile us to the father and he is the standard for both the husband and the wife in their marriage.

As Paul so aptly shows here, submission though both are called to it, is defined and explained in different ways, each according to the roles that God has given in the creation of male and female. We have been created to be mutually beneficial to one another, both having strengths and weakness, and the submission we are instructed here to accomplish is based upon those strengths and weakness. Christ laid aside his strength and his power for his bride, he allowed himself to be taken, beaten, and put to death...and this should be our driving love for him, as his bride, as his church, growing all the more in our reverence, and love for him. Do you see how these 2 separate roles are working together and how our relationship with Christ is a reflection of what our marriage should be, and a Christian marriage is a reflection of what our relationship with Christ should be?

Christ sacrificed himself, so in love we submit to him, wives are to be such to their husbands, as unto the lord, and likewise husbands are to be like Christ sacrificing for their wives unto the Lord. Do we always accomplish this? Are we perfect in our sacrifice and service? We fail one another in the church, we fail one another in our marriage, and we fail Christ. But likewise, he has forgiven us for he knows our failures and our weakness and he loves us and will forgive us. Likewise we are to be quick to forgive our spouses, quick to forgive each other, and seek to live in unity to the glory of our Lord and Savior who bound us together. May God give each and every one of us this strength to be worthy of this calling, both in this congregation, and in our marriages, That we always seek for unity even when difficulty and division seems to be the easier route, may we see each other first as those who are in Christ, as we seek to live as he has called us to live, with those whom he has brought into our lives.