

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (12-10-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 5:22-33

Christian Marriage

Introduction

Ephesians is in two parts – doctrine and practice. Christian practice affects every area of life. We have already dealt with life in the Church, and now life in the home, starting with marriage, then parents and children. Finally we shall come to how Christian practice affects life in the work place.

Ephesians 5 has one of the great Biblical statements about marriage. Not too popular in some quarters, especially with those influenced by Modern Feminism, because “submit”, required of wives, seems to suggest women are inferior (to be looked at later). But this passage together with the rest of New Testament has the highest picture of marriage, and an exalted picture of womanhood. It was quite revolutionary when written. In Paul’s world, women were very inferior, they were virtually chattels, treated with disdain and brutality.

Jewish women in law were a thing, not a person. They had no legal rights, and the husband could do what he liked with her, as his possession. In Greek life, prostitution was an essential part of life. Companionship and fellowship in marriage were unknown. The wife cared for the man’s legitimate children, while he found pleasure and companionship elsewhere. In the Roman world, marriage was in chaos, and fidelity was unknown. Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be remarried. Jerome writes of a Roman woman who married her 23<sup>rd</sup> husband, and she was his 21<sup>st</sup> wife. Also, of another woman who had 8 husbands in 5 years.

It was the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and His Church, which completely transformed this situation. He led the way in treating women with respect and honour, and He taught equality before God of all human beings. This concept was unknown before.

Going to look at the teaching of this passage about marriage, and the relationship between husband and wife. Note that the emphasis is not on rights and privileges but on duties and responsibilities. Not about what we expect, but about what we owe. When these are taken seriously, they make the home what God intended it to be – the happiest place on earth, and such a powerful witness to the outside world of the power and grace of Christ in human lives.

C.H.Spurgeon said, “When the home is ruled according to God’s Word, angels might be asked to stay with us, and they would not find themselves out of their element”.

The nature of marriage

Need to stress this, because Christian teaching about the uniqueness and permanence of marriage is under attack. It is an out of date notion to many people. They would say

that, and live accordingly, without any shame. The Bible clearly teaches the union of one man and one woman in the marriage bond, the context where physical, emotional and spiritual needs are met, is the will of the Creator. It was not man's idea, or a social arrangement, but the Creator's ordinance. For all His creatures, and not just the redeemed in Christ. The marriage service is to hallow the union between man and woman, to provide for increase of mankind, for companionship and help and comfort of partners and for the welfare of human society, which is strong and happy only where the marriage bond is held in honour. Must also state that the unmarried state, to which some are called also, has the same standing before God.

It is an exclusive relationship, and permanent. The most sacred of all human unions, over-riding all other bonds. "Till death us do part" – though the Lord allows divorce on the grounds of adultery.

"Christian marriage" is marriage with an added and very positive dimension. Marriage between two children of God, drawn to each other by Him, under His guidance and for His purposes and depending on His resources. It has strength, depth and staying power far greater than ordinary marriages, because ruled by the principle and motto "Each for the other, and both for God". That is the only kind of marriage a Christian should enter. A Christian marriage has not two partners, but three – the man, the woman, and the Lord. For the Christian, it is the Bible, and not 20<sup>th</sup> century opinion, that will determine our view of marriage and its nature.

#### Responsibility of the Wife

**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church** (Ephesians 5:22). This statement makes many feminists and people in various liberation movements furious, in our age of permissiveness and freedom. Deeply resented because it suggests women are inferior, and to be treated as slaves, to be oppressed and exploited. This is a complete misunderstanding of the Christian position.

Essential equality of all men and women in Christ Jesus is found throughout Scripture. **There is neither... male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:28). Equal in salvation, equal before the Lord, equal in privileges as believers. But need to distinguish between people's status before the Lord, and roles or functions. God has placed headship and leadership in the family on the man. This was his purpose in both creation and redemption. This does not mean that woman is essentially inferior. The fact that a team has a captain does not mean the other players are inferior. The chairman of a committee does not mean the other committee members are inferior. The Speaker in the House of Commons does not make the rest of the MP's inferior. So it is in creating and redeeming man and women, that the leadership role is invested in the man. (1 Corinthians 11:3-12; 1 Timothy 2:11-13; Genesis 2:20-23). The man's gifts, mental constitution, and physical make-up confirm the male's headship. Just as in other areas, woman is his superior, e.g. in love and devotion and self-denial.

The man is the head, and the woman is to complement him as helpmeet, homemaker, encourager and comforter. She will make up for his deficiencies. Luther said of his wife, "The greatest gift of God is a pious amiable spouse who fears God, loves his

house, with whom one can live in perfect confidence.” But the authority and government is lodged with the man. This is taught in Scripture, grounded in nature, and proved in experience. If this is ignored, both parties are degraded.

The woman’s submission is not to be grudging and reluctant. It comes from love, and is a joyful, willing part of discipleship because behind the husband’s authority is the Lord’s, who gave that authority. Not to be met with resentment and rebellion. No problem for the Christian wife who loves to please Christ. She is called to submit to husband “in everything”. Clearly to be interpreted in the light of the total context of Scripture. Is the wife to do literally everything her husband tells her, in all cases? There are qualifications. No husband has the right to force her to act against her conscience or to do what is wrong. If the husband becomes insane, obviously she is not to obey him in everything. No husband should interfere with her relationship to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Supreme relationship is to God Himself. If there is a clash of loyalties, there is no question to whom the wife should give obedience. As Peter told the Sanhedrin, **We must obey God rather than men** (Acts 5:29).

### The Responsibilities of the Husband

**Husbands, love your wives, (how much?) just as Christ loved the Church** (and how much was that?) **and gave himself up for her** (Ephesians 5:25). The Greek word used is *αγαπη* or *αγαπαω*, (one of the four Greek words for love) meaning love which is concerned to give, and not to get. Calvary love, where Christ set the pattern. Christ loved the Church to death itself. He loved her so that she might be sanctified and belong to the Lord and be cleansed – a cleansing done through His Word and signified by Baptism. One day he will present her to himself with all imperfections removed, and she will be perfectly holy, and without blemish. This is how much the husband should love his wife.

The husband is not a tyrant, ogre, bully or dictator, to which the wife must submit. But instead he is one who loves her with a love which would give everything for her. Rather than frustrate or crush or limit her, he is concerned to provide, protect, care, and bring out her full potential and all her gifts, he longs for her full development, and wants her to have the very best there is. So headship is not to be used selfishly but for the benefit of the one who submits. This kind of love makes submission easy.

Calvin said, “Husbands should not be cruel to their wives... their authority should be a companionship rather than a kingship”. Calvin certainly displayed Christ-like love to his wife, and she returned it with love and obedience.

Marriage is meant to be like a tandem bicycle. The man in front steering, the woman backing up and supporting. But man keeps remembering the woman behind and therefore always considers her.

The big test is not what a man was like before marriage or in the early days, but what will he be like in the home day by day when there are problems and difficulties and trials, and when middle age and old age come along. Does his love then still reflect and remind people of Christ’s love for the church?

Paul strengthens his argument saying, **Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies** (Ephesians 5:28). This does not mean they should love their wives as they love their own bodies, but that they should love their wives because they are their own bodies. As the Church is Christ's body, so the wife in a sense is the husband's body. They are intimately united. They are one flesh. They are more than partners. They are two halves of one whole. Therefore, in loving his wife, he is loving himself. Never thinks of himself in isolation and detached from his wife. The wife is a part of himself. She is not an addition, still less an encumbrance. Because she is part of the husband, he is to nourish and cherish her. If he fails to do so, he will suffer himself, because she is his own flesh – part of himself.

The wife should be involved in everything. He should never act as a single man, or think as a single man. He should never neglect his wife or take her for granted. He should be concerned with what will help and please her. She should share his business affairs, worries and responsibilities. She is to be consulted and brought into his life. So the marriage will grow and develop and mature.

### Resources for Christian Marriage

So easy to state these facts and duties and leave it there. So easy to say Christians should have highest standards. Easy to be reminded that many have been won to the Lord because they have noticed the difference when entering a Christian home. But have to ask, would people notice anything different about mine? Gospel and divine resources ennoble marriage and raise it to higher level, but only can be maintained by the grace of God. No Christian marriage ought to be just “making a go of it” or “keeping together for the children's sake”, or “tolerating one another”. We need God's grace in every sphere and not least in our homes.

- Need divine grace to deal with ever-present problem of self and selfishness, and refusal to walk with God – which is the root of most clashes and upsets.
- Need grace to restrain tongues and criticism when we know the other person well.
- Need grace to give admonition with love, and receive it with humility.
- Need grace to persevere in prayer when changes are needed in the other person and in us.
- Need grace to encourage and build one another up and minister to spiritual needs.
- Need grace to keep us from taking each other for granted, and to remain courteous and appreciative.
- Need grace to admit we are wrong and ask forgiveness.

Divine resources are available. Remember the context – **Be continually filled with the Spirit** (Ephesians 5:18). One thing to know of them, another thing to lay hold of them. Therefore urgent need to pray for one another and with one another.

### Conclusion

Have we anything to put right with someone else? Are our homes and marriages – as far as we can ensure it – witnesses to the world? Ultimately all these things come

back, not to our relationship with the other person, but with our relationship with God. When He is in the centre of the life, when we are anxious to please Him and to go by His Word, this ensures that at least from our side we are right with others.

God first, the other person next, self last “Jesus – Others – Yourself” J-O-Y.