

The Christian and Marriage

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[0 : 00] Now this evening I want to look at this passage once again and its background is that here is the sort of lifestyle that results from being filled with the spirit of God.

We were saying this morning that when God is at work in a person's heart that work influences every aspect of his life. Not just his spiritual life but every aspect is touched by the power of God when he comes to work in a person's life.

And one important area of life that the Apostle Paul speaks of here is the marriage relationship and he teaches here how spiritual factors have got to be the basis and the pattern for building marriage on.

And so in this way here is how the spirit's work affects even the married relationship. Now last Lord's Day we said that there were two basic principles upon which Paul is building his teaching here.

First of all there is what marriage is and he takes there the principle that comes from the Old Testament when God first inaugurated marriage in the Garden of Eden.

[1 : 22] And he teaches that there are three elements in getting married. There is the leaving of father and mother. There is the breaking off of that relationship that has so moulded our outlook and characterised our outlook up to that point.

And there has been an accepting of a completely new relationship as the priority in our lives. Not only the leaving of father and mother but the joining of oneself in full commitment to one's wife.

And then as a result of that these two become one flesh. A partnership. A lasting, close, intimate partnership.

These are the three things that go into making marriage. Leaving the old relationship. Committing oneself to a new one. And thereby establishing a close, lifelong relationship.

Now that's what marriage is. Or that's rather what getting married involves. But how is now the married relationship to be regulated?

[2 : 36] Are there principles to guide married life? And Paul's great principle here is a very, very simple one. The marriage relationship is to be patterned upon the relationship between Christ and this people.

As is the relationship between Christ and this church. So is the relationship between the husband and the wife. In the marriage relationship.

You get that coming out time and time again in this passage. Verse 22. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husband as unto the Lord.

There's a spiritual dimension involved right there. And this is brought out more explicitly in the following verse. For the husband is the head of the wife.

Even as Christ is the head of the church. And similarly in the next verse. Verse 24. As the church is subject unto Christ. So let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

[3 : 41] And then again in the very next verse. It's brought out. Husbands, love your wives. Even as Christ also loved the church. And later on again in verse 29.

Even as the Lord nourishes and cherishes the church. So ought the husband to nourish and cherish his wife. As the Lord, so have we to do.

As the Lord conducts himself towards his people. That's the pattern by which married life is to be regulated. And that's what we're going to look at.

The outworking of that. That's what we're going to look at this evening. The first heading that I want to bring before you to discuss this matter is the status that is given to married life.

You can't get a higher status than that. To use an example like this elevates married life. And it makes it something obviously of the greatest worth.

[4 : 47] And of the greatest importance. And of the greatest seriousness. The relation between Christ and his people. Can you think of anything more wonderful than that?

It's lofty. It's a high idea. It's a wonderful thing. Yet married life is to be patterned upon that.

But majesty elevates marriage. And gives it a very important standing in our estimation. It's not something that is to be treated lightly.

It's not a joking matter. It's not something to be laughed over. As if there was a light and frivolous thing. The relation between a husband and a wife.

Would we laugh over a person being converted? And make a joke of it? Why should we laugh over folks getting married? Or contemplating it? Would we make a joke about the relation between Christ and these people?

[5 : 50] How can we make a joke about the relation between a husband and a wife? How can we make a joke about the relationship between a husband and a wife? It doesn't just elevate married life as such.

What it particularly does is that it points to the importance of the relation precisely between the husband and wife. It's not a matter of what suits us best.

It's a matter of what is laid down in the scriptures. It's based upon the relation between Christ and his church. Is it then something that alters with changing times?

Is it something that we can change with changing fashions? In this are we going to be accommodating our views to the ideas of the world? Thinking that it's flexible and open-ended, whatever we like we can do.

Or is it not the case that we must pattern it upon what is said in the word? Since it is allied to such an important principle as the relationship between Christ and his people.

[6 : 57] We can't enter into marriage and work out our own terms of how we're going to deal with one another. According to our temperament or according to our circumstances in life.

Yes, there's a fairly wide measure of flexibility about things. But the general principles are laid down in the scriptures as abiding principles. Because they're tied to something that will never change.

The relationship between Christ and his people. And I think you see this too elevates marriage in another sense. You see, the basic way of describing this is that the wives should submit to their husbands.

Because the husband is the head of the home. And that of course is something that is not naturally palatable. And it is something that is open to misunderstanding and to abuse.

But it will never be open to that when we see that it's patterned upon relations between Christ and his people. If that's in the background of our mind, it takes any sting out of this that might be thought to be in it.

[8 : 14] But it seems to me that this biblical doctrine that we're dealing with here, it evokes two, it calls up two wrong responses. On the one hand, submission to husband has been considered to be degrading.

It means the wives are down trodden. And it means that they are degraded by having to submit to somebody else.

Is it degrading to submit to Christ? And is it degrading for his sake to submit to someone else? Is it degrading for his sake to submit to God?

And when we see that, and when we see that this is commanded by the Lord to whom we submit, without any feeling of being degraded by it, or being down trodden by it, we recognise that this isn't something that enslaves or brings bondage, or drags a woman down to an inferior position.

But it's something that shouldn't be acceptable, because to submit to Christ is something that is wholly acceptable in the Christian life.

[9 : 56] And then, of course, the other wrong attitude that this teaching evokes. It's a sense of proud superiority in the husband.

How many folks are proud and delight to think of themselves as a boss? That arrogance will be completely removed when we see it in terms, in those terms that are described here.

If we think this fills us with a sense of power, or that it gratifies our arrogance, then we've lost the perspective that is placed upon us by the Scriptures.

Is that what Christ's headship means to him? Does he gloat over the fact that we are submissive to him? Not at all.

He demands absolute obedience. But it's a gentle submission that he looks for. My yoke is easy, he said, and my burden is light.

[11 : 06] He's no tyrant. He doesn't do this for selfish motives. And nothing of arrogance can be found in the attitude of Christ towards his people, though he be head of them.

And that's what happens here too. This headship, it's not a privilege. It's a responsibility. To pattern ourselves upon the example of Christ.

To act to our lives as Christ acted towards his church. Is that a privilege that we can boast of? Is it not a responsibility? That is an awful responsibility.

And that no one in their right minds would want to accept it. Except that it's commanded in God's word. And I think, you see, when we see this as patterned upon the relationship between Christ and his people, it takes all sense of arrogance out of being head of the home.

And that's why I think that this relationship between Christ and his people as the pattern of married life, is something that exalts marriage, and gives it a status and an importance that it would not otherwise have.

[12 : 30] It takes the sting out of what is taught here. If we focus our attention upon the relationship between Christ and his people, all these negative feelings and improper attitudes will disappear in the measure in which we contemplate our attention upon the example of Christ that is given here.

So that is the status that this gives to married life. Now let's go down now to the more practical area. How married life is to be regulated.

Now, obviously this involves a mutual relationship as we've said already. Headship on the one hand, submission on the other. But I want to take everything from the man's point of view, and not because I'm a man.

Indeed, I'd much rather do it the other way around if I were to follow my inclinations. Because what it says about men here are so far-reaching that it's awesome. But why I want to take it from the man's point of view is because he says more about men than he does about the women here.

And I think that when we see what is required of them, then we'll understand better what the whole marriage relationship is to be like, according to God's law. So what's involved in the man being the head of the home, according to the scriptures?

[13 : 58] And the first thing, obviously, is authority. Even as Christ is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife.

Christ is the head of the church, because he's the one to whom the church looks up. The one whose authority is acknowledged in the church.

The one who has a right to direct the church, and to lead it in his own ways. The head of a school, the head of a business, is the person that's ultimately in charge of the matter, with whom the final responsibility and authority rests.

And that's what the headship of the home means in the first place. Authority. And that authority, as we've said already, is to be patterned upon the authority of Christ.

And that's something that's well worth reflecting on. How does Christ command? That's the way we've to command. How does Christ exercise that authority?

[15 : 09] That's the way we've to do it too. And I don't find Christ standing over me with a whip, nor do I find him directing me in all the minor details of daily life, and pouncing on me if I make a mistake.

It seems to me that Christ directs me by laying down general rules and leaving us to get on with it. And I find that he overlooks most of our failures and leads us gently into his ways, letting us learn by our mistakes and things like that.

He is our Lord, but he's not our boss. And that's the way things have to be in the home as well. Authority. It finally rests with the man.

But this authority is not alone. That's not the whole of the biblical pattern. And it's to be joined with the other aspects that are mentioned here, or else it gets distorted.

And the next thing that this headship involves is love. Verse 25. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.

[16 : 34] Christ was the head of his people when he died upon the cross. Theologically speaking, that is what he was acting as, the head and the representative of his people.

For him, headship involved the giving of himself. Because he had authority over the church, he was responsible for the church. And because he was responsible for the church, he had to die for the church.

Because he was head of the church, he had to do something about the sins of his people. And he therefore gave himself willingly and freely out of love on the cross of Calvary.

It was a specific part of the headship of Christ that he loved his people, even to giving himself for them. That's the pattern of headship in the home as well.

Husbands, love your wives. Even as Christ also loved the church. What is meant by this love? What is meant by the love that God had towards us?

[17 : 42] Or that Christ had towards his people? That's the sort of love that's spoken about here. There's a lot of, there's several words that can be used in the Greek language to describe love.

But this is the one that's used about God and his people. And it's become a very, very Christian word. It isn't romantic love that's being spoken of here.

It's a love that springs from commitment. It's a love that resides in the will and that therefore spreads thereafter to other aspects of one's being.

He's not saying to men here, you feel towards your wife what you felt when you first fell in love with her. And he's certainly not saying you feel towards her what you felt in your honeymoon.

He's saying you feel what Christ felt towards his church. And that's something far, far more reaching than what the world calls love.

[18 : 40] And what we've been taught to build marriage on. And it's something much more demanding and something different entirely in nature for what passes as love in the glossy magazines today and in the TV screen and in the world in general and in the church too in general.

It's something far different from the common concept of love that is used about marriage. The love of Christ to his people. That's what we have to feel in regard to our wives.

And you see, that means that it's something practical. The love of Christ is associated with him giving himself for the church. It's constantly said that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And it's said here, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. It's a practical concern. And that's the third thing that I want to say goes into headship.

Not just authority. And not just this special type of love which is different from the romantic love that is made so much of in society today. But there's this practical aspect to it.

[19 : 54] Practical concern. That's the way I want to put it. Otherwise, perhaps, it doesn't altogether do justice to what I've got in mind. What came from this love of Christ? Everything.

It was far-reaching in its extent. He gave himself for the church. He gave himself on the cross. He didn't spare himself anything.

He didn't hold anything back. And the practical purpose of that was that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. He gave himself for the church that the church might be converted.

That they might come to the experience of having their sins washed away and come to this time when they knew that they were right with God. But that's not the only thing that was in mind in the giving of Christ for his people.

Verse 27 speaks of a male distant goal but one that he still had in mind when he gave himself for his own that he might present it to himself.

[21 : 02] A glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish. There was something very practical about that.

The perfection of his spouse. That is what Christ was doing for his people. That's what he had in mind in giving himself. Holiness without blame.

That was the practical aim that he had in mind. And all this is summed up in verse 29. No man ever yet hated his own flesh but nourishes it and cherishes it even as the Lord the church.

The Lord nourishes the church. He looks after us. He feeds us. He provides for us. He equips us with everything that we need for our spiritual development so that not only will we be saved from sin but we will have sin taken out from us entirely.

And he cherishes us. That is he feeds us in love. He feeds us gently and tenderly in a positive way for our upbuilding and development.

[22 : 14] That's the picture of the practical concern that is characteristic of the head of the home. There's nothing here degrading as if a wife could be treated as a thing and nothing more.

There's to be the presiding over her of her development. There's nothing restrictive as if on being married a person had to stop developing in their gifts and their talents and their abilities.

But scope was to be provided rather for their fuller development in every way possible because that's what Christ did for his people. He nourished the church providing them with what was necessary that they might be all that he desired.

Sure for us there's restrictions placed upon us by Christ. There's limits beyond which we're not allowed to go. And that's the way it is for the woman in marriage too. We're not going to deny that.

There are restrictions for the wife in marriage according to the word of God. But there are likely the restrictions that God places upon his people. These aren't irksome things for us that are detrimental to our welfare.

[23 : 25] These are things that are for our benefit and for our positive upbuilding. In submitting ourselves as Christians to the law of Christ we don't find restriction but we find perfect freedom and liberty.

And that's the way it ought to be in the home. By abiding within the limits that God has set and by the husband acting in this way that Christ has ordained. There should be no sense of irksome restriction but every thought of real freedom for one's proper development within the limits that God has set.

That is the pattern of things in the home according to God's way of looking at things. Headship means authority yes undoubtedly but it also means love and practical concern based upon the very example of Christ.

That's the pattern of marriage as far as the Bible is concerned here. Now lastly I just want to say something about the importance of this today and here this not only becomes somewhat embarrassing but it could become also somewhat invidious making distinctions between one and another and all I'm going to do is apply this in the most general way we are in different situations and obviously this is a special reference to those that are married and to those that may in the future hopefully be contemplating it someday.

and it may not seem to have too much relevance to those that have been married or that are not likely to be married now and we're all in our different situations and it can be difficult to say anything on a very practical level without feeling a measure of embarrassment for those that are not in our own situation and I leave it to the conscience of the husbands here to apply this to their own lives as I leave it to the conscience of the wives here to apply this teaching to their own situation and I want to say something in more general terms that all of us whatever our married condition might be could well accept.

[25 : 39] the first thing I want to say is listen let's not fail to uphold this as the ideal for marriage there can be no doubt that just as how one begins marriage is under attack today as we saw last time so what it means to be married is also under attack and the Christian has got to strenuously uphold the teaching of God's word about marriage relationships today we can no more compliment we can no more we can no more give up these principles we can we cannot compromise with the world on these principles any more than we can compromise on how marriage starts marriage starts by an act of leaving an old relationship and full and clear and decisive commitment to a new one and then there is that union established that's where marriage begins and we say that in the world today and we cannot compromise on that and we cannot compromise on this either that the husband is head of the family and that means you see we've got to explain very very clearly what headship involves because is it not the case that this

Christian view of marriage is under attack and the real reason that one of the main reasons for it being so is because it has not been properly put over or properly practiced or properly understood headship does not just mean authority headship means love and practical concern too and the world has been put off this Christian view of marriage partly because headship has been made to mean only one thing and it's because there has been this distortion rejection of what the Bible says it's because there has been taking of one idea and a failure to do justice to the others it's partly because of that that the Christian view of what marriage means has been undermined and destroyed in society around us today and our duty is to hold on to what the scriptures say and never let it slip from our minds that this is the biblical pattern and we have to see the demand for equality of status within marriage as essentially evil in that case marriage becomes a two headed monster it's a contradiction of the distinctive way in which God made man and woman to pretend that they both get the same roles within the marriage relationship

God gave to man his distinctive form and his distinctive psychology and God gave to woman her distinctive form and the psychology that goes with it and to blur that distinction that God has made and to pretend that there is equality of role or identity of role within married life is to make is to blur the distinction that God has set it's contrary to the teaching of this passage of scripture and to others and it's contrary to the very nature of marriage that involves commitment to somebody else the world today is against the spirit of dependence the one upon the other in marriage folks still want to be independent but the very nature of marriage is commitment to one to the other which implies dependence this view that the same role can be occupied by the woman as by the man works on the principle that it's degrading to be dependent the scriptures never speak like that speak like that and this view practically puts the whole relationship under strain in a society like ours where these views are current men become afraid of accepting the traditional role in marriage and then they become incapable of doing so in any rational fashion it leads to enormous strains if people don't know what is expected of them in relationships and that's partly why marriages break down today at such a rate as they do people enter into them without any idea of what their role in marriage is and that's because it's been undermined by a false teaching that says there is no difference in role between man and woman in the marriage life and so that's what our response to the world must be these tendencies that were spoken of are against

God's word the tendency for the man merely to be the boss of the home without also showing love and practical concern these two are contrary to God's word and are no part of the Christian ethic or teaching and it's when we return and as Christians it says we return to the full and balanced presentation of marriage as it's given here that we'll be in a position to rebuke the world for their ignorance and for the immense damage they're doing to an institution of God's making and then the final thing that I want to say by way of practical application here is this note here the centrality of the relationship between Christ and his people that's the basis of living to know the relationship between Christ and his own that's all important you can't practice this until you know that you can't base your marriage upon that until you're acquainted with it can you husband love your wife as Christ loved the church unless you know in your experience how Christ loved the church can you wife be submissive to your husband unless you know what it means for the church to be submissive to Christ if there isn't an experience of these things it's hardly likely there will be able in the fullest sense to do justice to what

Paul is teaching here and this is just one instance of a very general principle for good experience in marriage and everything else an awareness of the love of Christ towards his people and an experience of it is absolutely essential in our sort of society to get back to this biblical standard you've got to know from experience what he's talking about and you've got to feel in your own heart what it means for Christ to have loved you and to have given himself for you and you've got to know what it means to submit to Christ and that's the final question that I want to put to everybody is your life in marriage and outside marriage and everywhere else is it based upon this an awareness of God's love towards his people and a submission to him as your head that's the question that we've got to ask ourselves the

[33 : 55] Christian faith matters in practical matters it counts it's the basis of everything and that's what's been taught here it's a foundation in which to build a marriage it's a foundation in which to build a business it's a foundation in which to build everything have we got that foundation because if we don't have the foundation it's not very likely that we'll be able to build very much when everything around us is trying to knock it down so can we say Christ has loved me and has given himself for me and we come to the stage where we've seen ourselves as sinners and we've recognised that Christ is the Saviour and we've so committed our lives to him as we've entered into this wonderful position that humbly and by grace we can say Christ has loved me and given himself for me that's where it all starts and that's where you've to start if you don't have that already don't try and build before the foundation is laid and the foundation in this matter and in every matter is our relationship to Christ a Saviour may he bless to us his word let's pray our gracious

God we acknowledge that we have failed so often to grasp the balance of your word and fail to see its implications for our lives and we have to confess our sin in this respect and how little we have paid attention to your truth or realised its practical outworking in daily life and we pray that you would help us to have proper understanding of what is required of us within the marriage relationship and that we might seek by your grace to return to that pattern that is laid down in your word and to practice it to a fuller extent and we pray to you that you would help us to have an understanding about the situation of society around us that it lost its way and is undermining the things that God has sought to establish and we pray that we might lay this to heart and never cease to plead that the time might come when in our society once again your word in this respect might again be honoured and we might see in a fuller way even than hitherto this wonderful example practiced so bless your word to each one of us may none of us feel that it doesn't touch us because of our situation in life but may we all be challenged as we reflect upon the need for

Christ to be at the centre of all our activities so make it profitable to us all in our individual circumstances we ask it in Jesus name Amen