

D&B; Wedding Sermon

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[0 : 00] Welcome to any visitors who are with us this morning. It's great to have you with us. Great to see some old friends as well here. Lovely to see you guys. And what a happy celebration and reason to be together. It is a little snapshot of heaven, isn't it, this morning.

So today we have witnessed the creation of a new home. But what is that home supposed to look like? Roy has already mentioned we find ourselves living in a society at the moment that is particularly plagued by confusion about marriage.

We value diversity and personal autonomy so your home can look like anything you want it to look like. There is no normal. There is no ideal. There is no right or wrong, except for a few kind of caveats that our society hasn't emotionally accepted yet.

Politically, of course, marriage has been defined in our country by popular vote. And the marriage contract, which is weird, it's kind of one of the only contracts where the words don't really mean anything anymore.

Even though people say, till death us do part, what many people in our society really take that to mean is, as long as we feel like it.

[1 : 16] Till death us do part is really just a sort of sentimental way of saying, I'm really, really in love with you. And I can't see that feeling ever fading. But of course, when those feelings do fade, and when marriage starts to get in the way of my personal happiness or my career or whatever it is, you know, if my marriage is not fulfilling me, well, then it's time to move on.

It would be wrong to stay locked into an unhappy marriage or something like that. So it's into that context that I think we should thank God for Ephesians chapter 5.

To me, this passage is like a lighthouse in an angry, swirling storm. What a great blessing it is when we need help and guidance in our lives.

Frankly, I find it horrifying when people are embarrassed by this passage because of how it offends our cultural sensibilities, is some of the things that it says. Quite the opposite.

When there are so many confusing and chaotic cultural crosswinds, to have something like Ephesians 5 from God to point the way through for us.

[2 : 25] Isn't that a great blessing? What wonderful news that God speaks to us about marriage. And you'll notice in this passage that Paul anchors his teaching on marriage in creation.

Marriage was something designed and instituted by God from the beginning. The quote in verse 31 is from Genesis chapter 2, which we had read for us. In the beginning, God made the first man and the first woman and he brought them together in marriage.

And they were so excited to see each other. Or at least the husband was excited to see the wife.

What we're looking at this morning has not been concocted in the last five minutes by popular vote. And it wasn't dreamed up by a bunch of medieval churchmen or religious people or something like that, thankfully. Remarkably, what Paul is teaching us this morning is that marriage has always been at the very center of God's plans and purposes for his world.

That's how big a deal it is. And it's not just a New Testament thing, marriage. It doesn't go back to Moses, though that would be significant.

[3 : 44] It goes back further than him. It doesn't go back to Abraham. Marriage goes back to Adam and Eve. Before the fall, God had a plan to put marriage at the very center of his purposes for humanity.

So as we read this passage this morning, Paul tells us about what marriage was made to be in the beginning, what our marriages can be now, if we keep following after Christ.

And finally, Paul talks about the future of marriage, what God's ultimate purpose for marriage always was, and so where marriage is heading. Now, many of you will know that Paul's letter splits

into two halves, this letter of Ephesians.

But because we haven't worked through it recently, let me just give you a quick rundown. You might not be familiar with it, that's fine. But basically, in chapters 1 to 3, Paul explains how and why God has given us new life.

Okay? Ephesians chapter 2 says, Once we were dead in sin. We're all dead in sin. But by grace, that is just because God is so loving and kind, just because of his sheer undeserved love, God has given us new life free from our sins.

[4 : 51] He did that by uniting us to the Lord Jesus. So that when Jesus died, we died. When Jesus rose again, we rose again. And we share in that kind of resurrection power.

So the first half of Ephesians is about new life. And then in chapters 4 to 6, the argument proceeds that now that we have new life, God expects and empowers us to lead new lifestyles.

Okay? New life, new lifestyles. And the key to our new lifestyles is the Holy Spirit. So, God's Holy Spirit living within us is what unites us to Jesus so that we can live this new life.

So back in chapter 1, verse 22 to 23, for instance, just flick there if you've got a Bible open. And Paul tells us that God raised Christ up from the dead and he put all things under his feet and gave him, gave Christ, as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Or again, in chapter 4, skip over to chapter 4, verse 15. Verse 15, Paul describes how the life of the church is supposed to work.

[6 : 14] And he says that speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

See, Paul actually has been working with this idea for quite some time in the letter, that Christ is the head and we, the church, are his body.

He is nourishing us and looking after us as he uses each of the members of his body to speak the truth in love to one another.

You know, so he is using hands to care for feet and elbows to, you know, I don't know, do the bending, whatever, right? He's using each part of the body to nourish and care for the rest of his body.

He's the director of the body and that's his goal. So as I come up to you over morning tea or you come up to me and we speak the truth to one another, the gospel truth Paul is talking about, we speak the truth to one another because we love one another.

[7 : 23] Paul says that is Christ working through each member of his body to nourish and care for the whole body. So day by day, each week, he is changing us.

We are not yet what we will be. Christ's work in us is not complete and never will be in this life. But all the same, we are not what we were either. However, day by day, through each other, Jesus is freeing us from all the old habits of bitterness and jealousy, anger and cruelty, drunkenness, all manner of stupidity and sin.

We're stepping closer and closer towards God's good design for us as we step closer and closer to each other. And that includes now, as we reach chapter 5, that includes how we behave in marriage.

So Paul says in chapter 5 verse 18, it's always good to start this passage just a little bit before verse 22. We started reading in verse 15 for good reason. Look what Paul says in verse 18.

Be filled with the Spirit. Now that is the main heading or the main command that dominates the rest of the book. Paul says be filled with the Spirit.

[8 : 44] And then he lists four things to describe what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. It looks like addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with 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.

You see those four things, how they hang off the main command? Being filled with the Spirit looks like addressing one another, singing, giving thanks, submitting. And the accent is really on submitting as well because that's what's going to dominate the next section.

Paul is going to list various relationships where submission is important. Wives must submit to their husbands, children to their parents and slaves to their masters. So I think we often imagine that

being filled with the Spirit would be a kind of strange, supernatural experience.

You know, people babbling in strange languages, falling over, laughing uncontrollably. That was just the 90s. And it is a supernatural experience, but it's hardly strange in this passage.

Submitting. Or we imagine it must be a sort of transcending emotional experience, an amazing feeling of peace or joy or warmth or wonder. And I mean, I'm sure the Holy Spirit can make us feel very emotional.

[10:11] But the accent here is not on emotion, but on what we do. Paul says, spirit-filled people, whether they feel like it or not, will address one another and sing to the Lord and give thanks and submit where appropriate in their different relationships.

And that really is a supernatural work, isn't it? Because sometimes it's hard. Submitting when you don't feel like it, that's more supernatural than submitting when you do. Or feeling great all the time. And actually, it makes perfect sense of what the Holy Spirit comes to do, which is to apply the gospel to us. And the gospel is news of God's grace. So, of course, the Holy Spirit leads us in giving thanks.

The whole shape of the gospel is one of thankfulness for our salvation, thankfulness in response to grace, and one of submission to Jesus as Lord. Submission is not some peripheral feature of the Christian life, as if Paul is tacking on a few random things here at the end of his gospel-shaped book.

No, it is, submission is absolutely the most basic and fundamental response to the news that Jesus is the King. Our world doesn't like to submit, but the gospel teaches us the goodness of it.

[11:38] So, without further ado, let's dive in. Firstly, wives in verses 22 to 24. Wives, this is what it looks like to have a spirit-filled marriage, a marriage that reflects the magnificent work of the Spirit in our lives.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. So, obviously, the key word is submit. The word just means to yield to authority.

Sometimes it's used pretty much interchangeably with the word obey, as it is in this passage. That's what Bella has promised here today. She is going to respect Daryl's authority, follow his lead, submit to him, obey him.

And in verse 23, you'll see Paul gives a reason for his command to wives. The simple reason that wives should submit to their husbands is because, Paul says, the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body.

[12:55] So, notice the indicative language here. It's not that the husband should be the head of the wife, or that different couples can decide for themselves. Paul is saying that that's just how it is. The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.

There's no way to change that. And the point is that the head leads the body. The head has authority over the body. The head directs the body. Just as Christ rules his body, Paul is encouraging wives to submit to the rule of their husbands.

In the same way that, as members of church, they submit to Christ. Which I take it means, at least, gladly, and cheerfully, and so on.

But explicitly, in verse 24, Paul says it means, in everything. Dear Christian wives, is there any area in your life that you don't submit to Christ?

And Paul is saying, in the same way, you must also submit to your husband in everything. Now, of course, this excludes obvious things, like if your husband asks you to sin, you don't have to follow him.

[14:10] In fact, you mustn't, because first and foremost, we submit to Christ, our greater husband. But just in the day-to-day, when your husband wants to go one way, and you want to go the other, submit.

Now, Bella, you know that's not going to be easy. I mean, I know you know that. So how are you going to do it? It's not going to be easy, especially when Daryl is a terrible leader.

Or making stupid decisions. When it's hard to trust him. On a day like today, when Daryl looks fabulous, and making those kinds of promises might seem easy, and it's exciting, and Daryl's a stand-up guy and all, and I hope there'll be lots of wonderful, easy days.

But on those hard days, how are you going to do it? Submission under a great captain is wonderful. Isn't it? Following an exciting leader.

Oh, captain, my captain. When you see the sense of a decision, or you don't feel strongly about your objections, submission can be easy and enjoyable.

[15 : 22] And very often, we hardly notice that we're doing it. Because we do it all the time in all sorts of relationships. For instance, we've all been doing it this morning, we've tried to submit to the band.

We've been trying to sing in harmony. We don't each go our own way with the melody. You know, no one's going to tell me what note to sing. Submission looks like working together, under leaders, under managers and CEOs, not going solo on every new project or business.

You know, it's about waiting in queues, which, as an English person, very important to me, is about waiting at traffic lights, you know, not barging through with your elbows raised or horn blaring.

Submission is about yielding to the authority of the lollipop lady, you know, who is not here to oppress us, but is playing her role in leading in this particular situation and giving us the time to cross.

See, submission is often easy, often goes unnoticed, it's often enjoyable. It is, in fact, the key to any happy, functional society at both the micro level of the family and the macro level of the nation.

[16 : 38] But still, the difficulty comes when we don't like what our authorities want us to do. So how do we make sure that we please God and submit even then?

Well, of course, that's what Paul is saying that the gospel does in our lives. The gospel fills our hearts by the Holy Spirit, God's Word and Spirit, empowers us to live these new submissive lifestyles.

See, because submission isn't just hard because our leaders are often terrible, but actually what makes it really hard is the sin in our hearts. Remember, the Bible's definition of sin is pretty much that we don't like submitting because we each want to live our own way.

Sin is that desire within us to buck against or ignore rightful authorities that God has put over us and ultimately God himself.

So, of course, the Bible is unapologetic about the goodness of submission and what it means to embrace God's good order through the power of the Spirit. Becoming a Christian is about submitting yourself to Jesus as your king and as your husband, your shepherd, your master, and so on.

[18 : 08] And so, it also involves making a new commitment to submit to all the rightful authorities that God has put over us in this world, even when it's hard.

Daryl will not be the perfect husband. Bella, the world will tell you to ignore his leadership or manipulate him or whatever.

You know, don't let anyone else tell you what to do, sister. He can be the head, sure, but you be the neck that turns the head this way and that.

Just make him think that he's running the show. You know, that's what people will say to you. And that lingering sin in your heart will keep telling you to give in to all of those voices.

But remember, God's word and the promises you made here today. Submit. Quickly, gladly, as you would to Christ. Try and support Daryl's leadership with as much energy and enthusiasm as you can muster.

[19 : 12] Don't let the world confuse you. True freedom is not about living your own way, doing whatever you want. It's about living God's way according to his good design embracing your place in his world like a fish who knows their place in the sea or a bird in the sky.

A wife who learns to submit to her husband will find true freedom and joy in it. And now let's turn to husbands.

Paul says, husbands, love your wives. And before we read on, you may be forgiven for thinking that he's sort of stating the obvious. In fact, does this even need to be commanded?

Won't husbands just naturally love their wives? Well, no, of course. Marriage requires real, solid love that stands the test of time.

That kind of goopy, soppy stuff you see in the movies is not what Paul is talking about. It's not that there's anything wrong with that goopy, soppy stuff. You know, romance?

[20 : 20] And often it's very helpful. Nothing wrong with falling in love, that feeling of ecstasy. But that stuff will come and go. That stuff, it just won't do the job of hanging in there in the tough times.

What Paul wants is for husbands to make a firm commitment to their wives that come rain or shine, for better or worse, they will do good by them. They will seek their best interests. They will love them. And there are two complementary ways that a husband needs to think about loving his wife in this chapter, matching, of course, what he's already said to the wives. So firstly, in verse 25, husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church. You play that role. And secondly, in verse 28, husbands must love their wives as their own bodies. So let's take each of those in turn. First, the husband must love his wife even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. You'll notice how Christ's love for his church is definitively in the past tense.

[21 : 26] It's not that Christ doesn't love his church anymore, but Paul is talking about a particular moment in history when Christ loved his church. And that's the kind of love that husbands must have for their wives.

Of course, you know the time he's referring to. It was that time when he had, he let himself be crucified to save his bride.

I have been struck reading through Mark's gospel this year by just how much courage and determination and grit Jesus showed to walk towards the cross and face everything that was thrown at him there.

To stand, as it were, in the way of his bride to shield her from the wrath of God. What great love is this? The cross is not a romantic gesture, is it?

It's not a bunch of flowers. It's not a fancy credit card or he took her out on a nice date or an overseas luxurious cruise that they both enjoyed and he really wanted more than her.

[22 : 35] I think all of these things are nice in their way. But frankly that kind of love is cheap and easy compared to what Jesus did, isn't it? Jesus showed us on the cross the kind of love that is about self-sacrificial service.

If I can put it this way, it is about the kind of love that is so beautiful precisely because it is so ugly. The day in and day out greasy and grimy kind of love, the back-breaking work of changing nappies, scrubbing dishes, sticking at the nine-to-five job that you hate, running errands and coming home and listening attentively.

That's the beautiful thing at the heart of the Christian faith, isn't it? That Christ didn't stay in the pristine spotless clouds of heaven and send us romantic gestures from above. He descended to meet us in the weakness and darkness of our lives.

In this very painful and difficult world, he came to live in a stable, to wash feet, and to let the soldiers whip him and mock him and spit upon him and crucify him.

And this is the kind of love Paul expects husbands to have for their wives. And you'll notice Paul fleshes out the purpose of Christ's suffering in verses 25 to 27.

[23 : 56] Why did Christ die? It was to sanctify his bride, to cleanse her, to present her in splendor, etc. She mustn't even have a spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Of course, he's talking about inner beauty. And our aim as husbands. Sorry, just a private moment down here.

That was one of the first things my brother-in-law ever did for one of my sisters. I won't tell you which one. Went and squeezed a big pimple on her face. Anyway, when they were first married. That is not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about inner beauty. And he's saying our aim as husbands is ultimately the same.

To beautify our wives, to nurture and encourage their inner beauty, to wash them with God's word, which doesn't look like Bible studies all the time, but looks like talking about the gospel all the time, letting the gospel saturate your life, until they look on the inside like Bella does on the outside today.

[25 : 07] So I expect this will look like a lot of conversations about the Bible, about sermons that you really appreciated or that weren't great. It'll look like praying for Bella and encouraging her to look to Christ and serve him.

but first and foremost, see what Paul is saying is that Bella and our wives, brothers and sisters, or brothers, will become more and more beautiful as we model Christ to them.

It's not just as we teach them about Christ and tell them to be more beautiful inside, it's as we model Christ to them. See when your wife sees you sacrificially serving her, she will see Christ through you and she will grow more and more beautiful in response to your hard, hard-working love.

The key is that people who are loved become lovely, become lovely people. The power to change comes from being loved. It's not demands to change or even instructions and education about how our wives could be more beautiful that's going to do the job.

Those things again, they have their place. Christ, of course, instructs us. But he doesn't beat us over the head with standards or a new law that we can't live up to and just say be better.

[26 : 39] And it is all too easy for husbands to do that, to resort to harsh demands, heavy-handedness. I want things done a certain way and after all, I'm the head of the household and I'm pretty sure I remember that command about you submitting.

But that is not how Christ our Lord treats us, is it? No, brothers, he is a husband full of compassion and gentleness. He understands our weaknesses.

He came to help us, to lay down his life for us. He doesn't lord it over us even though he is our Lord. But he doesn't behave in the same way that the Gentiles do.

It's not a matter of ceding authority. He never ceded his authority. But he used his authority not to demand that we serve him, but to serve us.

He made himself a slave for us. That is the kind of lowly service that we are being called to here. And secondly, verses 28 to 33, Paul says husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

[27 : 44] So again, Paul returns to the head body image. But this time he has a different aspect he wants husbands to focus on. This time the key to the illustration is not hierarchy but unity.

Unity. See, a husband and wife are one body. They have become one flesh. So when a husband cares for his wife, he is caring for himself.

That's what he means in verse 28. And just skip down to verse 30, you'll see it again. Why does Christ look after the church? Verse 30. For we are members of his body. So you see, when Paul was addressing the wives, his emphasis was on authority.

That's something wives need to think about. But now, as Paul talks to the husbands, notice he doesn't emphasize authority. There is no call in this passage for husbands to enforce their authority or make their wives submit.

No, for husbands, Paul says, they must remember as the head that they are united to the body.

That's why the Christian idea of headship or leadership could never be, should never be, oppressive or abusive.

[28 : 53] Why would a head abuse its own body? That is Paul's point. It would be destroying itself. The head works with and for the body for mutual benefit.

They don't compete against one another or fight against one another. That would be destructive to both because they are united. their destinies are intertwined. One cannot win if the other loses.

They flourish or fail together. Paul says husbands should nourish their wives and cherish them.

That is to provide for them both physically and emotionally.

It's interesting how in this passage he kind of completes the trinita. He has husbands caring for their wives both spiritually and physically and emotionally. because they are one body.

All right so let me wrap up. Let me just leave you with a couple of things to remember. Okay. First notice that none of the commands in this passage are conditional. Bella you are not called to submit only when Daryl's leadership makes sense and seems right to you.

[30 : 01] And that's not submission that's just agreeing. Daryl you are not called to love only when Bella is being lovely. Real love endures beyond the honeymoon even when your spouse isn't so lovely.

That's what Christ's love for us was like. So none of this is going to be easy of course. It's just like building anything that's really beautiful. Isn't that right?

You know often a great piece of art looks effortless from the outside. But the artist knows how much hard work and blood sweat and tears have gone into creating it.

So it is with beautiful marriages. It is extremely hard. But remember this really is what your marriage can be if you rely on God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the spirit filled marriage that Paul is describing. It is not the human effort filled marriage. As if at this point in the book we just should leave the first half of the letter behind.

[31 : 10] No of course not. In the Christian life we never look for strength from within. We always look to strength from above. Flowing down from our head as it were who is the perfect husband seated in the heavens nourishing us with his living word with his spirit filled word.

And notice ultimately this passage is about an even greater marriage to come when we will see him face to face. In verse 32 Paul says that back in Genesis God was always talking about the marriage between Christ and his church.

He says this mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Marriage was always at the very center of God's plans for humanity.

When God first set up the institution of marriage in creation he always had this end goal in mind. The marriage of Christ and the church. So our marriages are a living illustration of that ultimate reality towards which we are all heading.

It has been embedded in every culture and time across the world. world. So Daryl and Bella I'm sure I can speak for everyone in this room when I say that we all hope that your marriage will be full of joy and delight.

[32 : 34] But the most important thing actually is to keep your eye on that future better marriage. To make sure the marriage you build keeps pointing people to that far greater and more glorious marriage to come.

Your momentary marriage will one day be eclipsed. However happy or horrible it is. However happy or horrible it turns out to be.

A far more perfect, intimate, wonderful, blessed marriage is coming beyond what any of us could ever have dreamed of. And if you keep looking to that marriage it will keep you going through thick and thin, better or worse.

Let's pray. Loving Father God thank you for our beloved brother and sister and this happy occasion to celebrate their wedding together.

We do pray that they would have a long and happy marriage full of great joy and memories, friendship, children, lots of love. Help them to be faithful to their vows.

[33 : 51] Please fill them with your spirit so that especially Bella might submit and Daryl might lead in love and lay down his life for her as Christ did for the church.

We pray Father that you would help us all to keep our eyes fixed on that glorious future marriage that will far outweigh and outshine these earthly pictures that you've given us.

Help us to keep our eyes on that and to keep pressing on towards that great goal and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.