

The Healing of the Body

Ephesians 5:21-30

Brett Shoemaker – September 6, 2015 – Faith Presbyterian Church

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak this morning, and I'm honored that you'll be here on Labor Day weekend to be able to start another season of ministry together, to share in the Lord's Supper, to come together as God's people and worship. Life is good in this moment. But I should admit, when I heard I would be preaching on *this* passage, I initially wanted to wiggle my way out. Without a doubt, this passage has done as much to stir up controversy as most of the rest of Scripture combined. But, you can't just take this second half of Ephesians 5 out and pretend that it didn't exist, as much as some of us, especially pastors, would perhaps like to.

I remember a young woman getting ready to head off to college coming up to me after church one week and asking, "What does it mean when it says, 'Wives submit to your husbands'?" I had ten seconds to answer. I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak this morning; to have more than a few seconds to try and see where we can find the life of God's Spirit this morning.

The title of the sermon as you have it in the bulletin this morning, is “The Healing of the Body.” This passage which has done so much to divide wives and husbands and churches in the controversy that it brings about has the *opportunity* to do the opposite. The Body of Christ has been damaged—not by the Scripture—but by our reactions to it over the last number of years in particular. This morning, I pray that there would be some healing. I pray that the Church as a whole would hear God’s Word as a chance to return to one another in our relationships, starting with marriage, that God intended NOT to separate.

Originally, this message had different title. Since Jeff preached a sermon last week called, “The Wise Investment of Our Lives,” I really wanted to call this one, “The Wise Re-vestment of Our Wives.” To “re-vest” is to restore power to somebody. Too often, this passage is seen as one that is trying to put women in a place of less power. I thought, perhaps it was time to change the rules of the game. And while at least half of you might be saying, “Amen!” the problem is that it is still the same game. With that title, we are still trying to weigh power, and *separate* the place and position of women and men in the roles they play. The Body itself needs to be healed. Paul was not trying to play this game with the Ephesians. His purpose was to encourage the church toward greater unity through one of the most important relationships in the Church—marriage. And along with marriage, he is also teaching us about the relationship Christ has with the Church. This purpose is too often misunderstood.

I’ve heard it said that a man marries a woman hoping she won’t change.
But that a woman marries a man hoping that he will change.

But I’m not so sure that’s true, at least not in my own marriage. On our wedding day, Wendy and I exchanged gifts, and she showered me with a number of very special and thoughtful things that were from the heart and let me know how much she loved me just the way I am. You know what I gave her for a wedding present? (Golf Clubs). Then, once I realized that was probably not what she was hoping for, I had the audacity to suggest that I had envisioned us playing golf together on our honeymoon. Well, the clubs went with us because they had nowhere else to go. But they never made it out of the trunk.

Probably no woman in this room, and most of the smart men as well would say that I should have brought up Ephesians 5:22 at this point in our relationship; that I should have insisted, based on Paul's words, that because I wanted her to play, she should simply submit. No one here would suggest that it was simply her wifely duty to conform to my image of what she should be. It was a great wedding, but it would have been a short marriage. So let's back up one verse.

Let's start with verse 21. I'll share a secret with you. I almost didn't include it. In the Bible I picked up first, this section of Scripture started with Verse 22: "Wives, submit to your husband." That was the starting point! No wonder so many mixed emotions have accompanied this passage! That's the wrong place to start for many reasons. For one, there is actually no verb in this sentence. None. The literal translation of this verse if it were to stand alone would be: "Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord." The English language doesn't like sentences without a verb, so the translators had to go searching for one. The natural place to look is in the sentence that precedes it, Verse 21. "Be subject to one another...Wives—to your husbands, as to the Lord." We see also, that this idea of submission does not stand alone, but is accompanied by another kind of submission—*as you are to the Lord*. The idea of submission is notoriously sour as we think of it in terms of other people. But there is submission of other kinds, which we as God's people claim as good and welcome into our lives. We can all think of about twenty other places that we could be this morning than sitting in these pews. But here we are to gather and sing praise songs, pray joyful prayers, celebrate together, in submission to a God that we claim as good. If I say, "God is good!" You will say back, "All the time!" Right. And so we put aside other places we could be, and fall before God in humble worship.

Here is where this phrase *as to the Lord* may be helpful. Submission can be good, when and if it is life-giving and helps us live into who God made us to be. AND, it's not just for the wives. Too often we forget the 21st verse, the verse that gave this phrase its verb. **Be subject to one another—why?—out of reverence for Christ.** Wives, to your husbands AND, it follows, husbands to your wives. This would have been the huge shift for Christians in the Ephesus church. A wife in Ephesus was the property, the prize, the gift to her husband. She knew that her place was to simply follow along, to submit, to the wishes of her husband. That's all she knew. For us, we read through this passage and we say, "WAIT, WAIT, WAIT, GO BACK. What do you mean 'Wives be subject to your husbands?' What do you mean, 'The husband is the head of his wife?'" That doesn't sound right at all! You better explain that.

I have to believe, though, that in the early church, when they first opened this letter, delivered from Paul, that they would have collectively read to the end of this section and said, “WAIT, WAIT, GO BACK. What do you mean, ‘Be subject to *one another*?’ You mean to my wife? What would my neighbors think? I’m not even sure my in-laws will understand. You better explain that.” It’s helpful to remember that this would have been a challenging message right from verse 21.

By the way, this message is not just for married couples. It holds wisdom for EVERY kind of relationship on earth as well. In all of our closest relationships, we are to model a kind of love that is humble, and “subject” to the other. Young people, that means to your parents, and parents, yes, even to your kids in certain ways. Paul talks about this in the next chapter, but this passage sets it up. There is wisdom about our attitudes toward our friends, those who work under us or over us in our work, and more.

But even more importantly, this passage points to a relationship deeper still, the relationship we have with Christ, and that Christ has with the Church as a whole. Every time in this passage that Paul encourages a certain attitude from wives or husbands, he follows it up with the reason or the motivation:

- Be subject to one another *out of reverence for Christ.*
- Wives, to your husbands, *as to the Lord.*
- wives should be to their husbands, *as the church is subject to Christ,*
- Husbands love your wives *as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her!*

From the very beginning of time, I mean the VERY beginning, God planned for marriage relationships to come together in unity. When God the Father created men and women he said that they were designed in marriage to become *one flesh*. Somehow, I cut that verse off in this passage as well, as it quotes that very Scripture. Isn’t this the theme of Ephesians as we’ve been studying it all along: UNITY? The purpose of lifting up the marriage relationship in particular as a model of the relationship with Christ is that God ordained it to be a relationship that would not be separated. *Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one tear apart.*

It is at weddings, during that sentimental part of the relationship, where this is quoted. But then, inevitably, separation begins to seep in. While we were young, we grew up with motivational speakers who said, “You can be anything or anyone you want to be,”

and, “Whatever you do, don’t let anything or anyone stand in the way of your dreams.” It is so ingrained in us, especially as Americans, that we deserve total independence, complete control over our own lives, that we should not and cannot submit or be subject to anyone else. No wonder it is so hard to hear these words. But let’s go back to the purpose of Paul’s letter, and his hope for Ephesus which has fallen on deaf ears because we don’t want to lose control of our power. Being subject to one another, and loving one another sacrificially is the *recipe for unity* if we will humbly allow that message into our marriages—and into our other relationships as well.

Some have wondered if Paul was talking to a church in which many marriages were in trouble, and he wanted to come to their rescue. Perhaps....but, actual separation of marriages was not so common. Also, Paul assumes Christ is on his way back VERY soon, possibly in their lifetime. So, no, Paul was probably not overly worried about marriages that were struggling. Paul had another reason: that marriage could be an example of Christ to the community. This is such a clear way for others to see and know what the love of Christ for the church is all about—through our closest relationships, especially marriage. What an opportunity to show others, even today, especially today, what it looks like to know and follow and love the Lord? I’ve got three quick suggestions, that all just happen to start with T. They should be common sense, but I have needed reminders about all of them in my own marriage:

**1. The world will see Christ in your marriage and other relationships by the way you:
TREAT ONE ANOTHER**

We have a rule in our house that we never go to sleep while we are angry with each other. Paul tells the Ephesians that one chapter earlier in 4:26. You know what that means in our house? It means we’ve pulled all-nighters. It means we just didn’t sleep some nights. But it means that eventually, we start the day fresh. It is not easy to keep communicating, sometimes in really difficult times until you can come to the place where you can love one another *as Christ loved the Church, sacrificing everything for the sake of the relationship*.

**2. The world will see Christ in your marriage and other relationships by the way you:
TALK ABOUT ONE ANOTHER**

Another good rule is never say anything but kind words to others about your partner. What we say about one another is a reflection of Christ working in our lives through our relationship. Christ died for his bride, the Church, in the ultimate act of forgiveness. Therefore, in our marriages, we are reminded of the wise saying: “Forgive and

_____?” No, I’m thinking of the other one: *Forgive and remember*. A marriage relationship, any close relationship, will require forgiveness on a daily basis. If our partner offers this to us regularly, we remember that constant grace. And we show can show others what real grace looks like as we receive it from Christ, and offer it in our marriages and other relationships.

**3. The world will see Christ in your marriage and other relationships by the way you:
TAKE TIME FOR EACH OTHER**

Easier said than done. We are busy people. Here was something refreshing I heard recently from a husband. I was trying to schedule a meeting of some kind with this person, and he could not meet at the suggested time. Do you know what his reason was?

He **wanted** to spend time with his wife.

He could have said with a huff, *Oh, I have this function with my wife I can’t get out of.*

He could even have said, *I **need** to spend some time with my wife,* because he felt it was an obligation to fulfill.

His reason was that *he wanted to spend time with his wife.*

Why is it that so often our time with our partners has to fit around other obligations, then sometimes gets squeezed out all together? It should be the other way around. Schedule the time with our most important relationships first, and let other events take a back seat if they happen at all. What an example of a relationship that is *subject to one another as to the Lord* when an event can’t happen because you want to be with your spouse.

There is a song by Third Day called *I SEE LOVE*. It creates a picture of what we see when we read about or think about Christ in Scripture. This is how it starts:

Some see a teacher standing on a hill speaking words of wisdom

Some see a healer reaching out His hand to give sight to a blind man

Some see a dreamer wasting His life for what can never be

Some see a fool dying for His dream

But I see love,

I see love

Light of heaven breaking through

But I see grace, I see God's face

Shining pure and perfect

Love when I see You

I see love

The question I have for us is this today. When people get a look into our marriages or our closest relationships, what do they see?

- Do they see two people doing great things but in very different directions?
- Do they see two people who tolerate one another, but with little affection?
- Do they see two people who talk highly of God but not always of one another?
- Do they see two people who never seem to spend any real time together?

Or, do they see love? A love that points to a greater and deeper love? Love with a capital L—A Heavenly Father who loved us first, loved us sacrificially, and loved us perfectly? Do we love because God first loved us, and it shows?

The message of unity Paul has for us, and God's ultimate message of love to each one of us, leads to this table. It is a table of God's grace that does not belong to any person or any one denomination or church. But a feast that unites. It is a meal in which all of God's people, coming from very different places, have made a decision to come together (much like a marriage), submitting to one another that they might be the Body of Christ together. We share this meal as a witness to the world that we understand the deep love of Jesus Christ in a real way, and that we will seek to love one another that the world might also know Christ. All are invited to partake in the Lord's Supper this morning. So, if you profess Christ as Lord, join us for this mysterious meal, in which we celebrate the love God has for us. We love one another in this meal, just as Christ loves the Church. We submit ourselves to one another, as to the Lord.

Let the feast begin.

What God has joined together, let no one tear apart.

Amen.