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August 25, 2013

EPHESIANS 5:25-33

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, as we come now before you, we ask that you would enlighten us, illumine the scriptures so that we have understanding. It's not just an ordinary book as some might read it, but because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us it comes alive and it speaks to us in very personal ways. It helps us understand how we should live. Lord, we're grateful for what you've done for us in that regard. So thank you for your word. As we're about to open it, we ask that you would be honored. We respect you, we respect your word and so we open the scriptures with reverence and respect today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Open your Bible with me to Ephesians 5. It's interesting to see all the pictures God uses in the Bible that compare the family to who He is and what He's designed for us. For example, when we get to know God we get to know Him as Father. We get to know Him as Father because God wants us to understand that relationship of what a Father really is. When we start understanding about the godhead and God and Jesus and how they relate, He gives us a picture of a father and a son, the Son of God, and so we have that relationship that describes how we understand God a little bit better.

When we talk about the earthly church, God refers to it as the household of God or the family of God. So we are a family together. That family picture is used to describe how we're to understand the fellowship that we enjoy in our relationships together.

When God talks about the husband/wife relationship He ties that into a picture of Christ and the church. There's the image that God has created of Christ and the church and He ties that into the marriage relationship. In Ephesians 5 that's described all the more.

Last week if you were here you saw that we talked about a wife and what makes the wife successful in the marriage relationship. God designed this. He knows that a woman is unique. Being in a position of a wife there's some certain things she needs to know in order to contribute to the marriage relationship and make it successful.

Today we're going to focus on the husbands. Look with me at Ephesians 5 starting in verse 25. I'm going to read the whole passage then we'll go back and take it apart.

Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own"

bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

There’s something here for husbands, something very important for them to understand. Verse 25 says, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* God has taught us in His word, the Bible, some final principles about relationships, about marriage. I’m convinced that biblical truths about marriage are not merely arbitrary rules. They’re created with a design by the designer, the Maker, who has a purpose in His teaching here about marriage.

God places high expectations on men and calls them to be leaders in the home. God has designed men to be take-charge kind of people. Men like to solve problems. I think that’s why a lot of young men like video games because they’re in there challenging the world, attacking whatever’s going on. They’re in there solving problems. Even though not just young men but even young children.

My grandson hated when he was two years old my son was teaching him how to clean up the playroom. He says, “I taught him how to do this by having him stand on a tile” (an honor tile he called it). He would say, “Hayden, what’s wrong in this room? Find something that’s wrong in this room.”

Hayden would say, “Shoes.”

Josh would say, “Fix it.” So Hayden would run over and take the shoes and put them on the front door.

Then he’d say, “Go stand on the honor tile again. What wrong?”

He’d say, “Papers.”

And then he’d say, “Fix it.”

So Hayden at two years old did this for about an hour. Why? Because he had this desire to fix things, solve problems, build something inside of him.

When my wife hands me the jar and says, “I can’t open this, honey. Would you open it?” there’s some ego producing thing inside of me as I screw the jar lid off. There’s something inside of men that God has designed to be leaders to solve problems.

When the Holy Spirit was crafting this passage for us He uses a particular word that men must understand. It is the word *agape, love your wives.* *Agape* is a sacrificial kind of love. It’s a giving, it’s a giving up of your rights.

The question for us today, the very important question that we’re going to ask the text today and understand is this: Lord, how am I supposed to love this woman? That is the question we’re

looking at. Let me first tell you, though, that if we don't love the Lord first then we'll have a hard time knowing the full understanding of what it means to love a wife.

Let's define love for the husband. Love is giving up someone's rights in order to serve someone else and demonstrate commitment through sacrifice. True manhood is marked by sacrifice. There's some men who won't lift a finger to help around the house. That's not loving; that's foolish.

It's interesting to me that God did not choose the term *eros*. There are several Greek terms He could've chosen for this passage. He did not choose the term *eros* which is the sensual, romantic, even sexual kind of love. He didn't choose that word. Why? Well, I don't think men have a problem with that. They know how to do that and they're very eager to make that happen. So God says, "That's not the word we're going to use to describe what you need in this relationship."

He also doesn't choose the term *philia*. *Philia* has the term companionship kind of emphasis. Being a friend. Because that isn't exactly the word that God wanted to use to describe the husband's role and very importantly what he needs inside of him in order to do his job.

He chose the word *agape*. The question is about sacrifice. So the husband needs to be asking himself this question: How can I sacrifice myself today for my wife? What rights do I think I have today that I need to lay down for my wife? Marriage is not a fifty-fifty proposition. It's about total sacrifice of one's rights for the other person.

A husband who wants to be successful in his marriage should continually find himself amazed at all the things he has to give up. If he gets angry because he has to do more than what's expected or because it's unfair or because his rights are violated or because his goals are blocked, then that anger is a spiritual indicator that something needs to be given up. Something needs to be sacrificed if he's going to be successful loving his wife. A husband who wants to have a successful marriage needs to know what sacrifice is all about, know how to give up his rights in order to move forward, and he can use his anger as an indicator.

If you're angry about the fact that your rights have to be given up or you have a blocked goal or your expectations aren't being met, that anger is an indicator that says, "Uh oh. There's something I haven't given over to the Lord here. There's something else I must give up in order to love my wife the way she needs to be loved in order for my marriage to be successful. My anger can be that indicator, helpful point that pinpoints that area of my life that needs to be adjusted."

Now I know you might have some objections here. You might be saying, "Well, what about my wife? She doesn't do this," or "What if my wife is selfish?" or "What if she's taking advantage of me?" We'll get to those objections later. Let's not miss the important message God has for the husband here by talking about some of the exceptions or some of the problems.

One of the ways men most minister to their wives is to increase their dialogue when they're talking to them instead of grunting as we talked about last week that some of us males do.

Engaging in conversation, listening, having meaningful dialogue with our wives is very important.

Husbands, if you were to have a list of the top things that you want out of a marriage, high on the list would be sex. I know. Women, if wives have a list of the top things they want in a relationship one of the things that's toward the top is going to be meaningful dialogue. It's very interesting that when men give their wives meaningful dialogue wives are more interested in giving sex. It just is how God designed the whole thing. And if men would spend as much time thinking about developing meaningful dialogue as they think about sex they would have a dramatically successful marriage relationship.

It means giving up, sacrificing. Sometimes that doesn't mean pulling back, it means doing more. Because now you're engaging with your wife in a way that she needs to be engaged in. I think that if men were doing the work that God wanted them to do in their marriage, wives would be totally shocked sometimes.

A husband was told by a marriage counselor that he needed to be more considerate of his wife. So he went out and he got some flowers and he got a box of candy. He got all dressed up in a suit, put on cologne, and he went to this front door, and he knocked on the door. His wife opens the door and right away she starts crying. She says, "Oh I can't believe it. Johnny was throwing up today, the dishwasher's broken, and now you come home drunk!"

I think wives would be surprised if you're doing what God wants you to do in a relationship. Love is an act of faith.

You might be saying, "Yes, but you don't know my wife or you don't know my husband." But the reality is we know God. And if we know God and we're serving God and obeying Him then good things happen in the marriage relationship.

Paul continues in verse 26 by amplifying this and talking more about the relationship between Christ and the church. Look at verse 26. *To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives.*

So there's this spiritual component in a relationship that is strategic. I tell young people if you're going to build a foundation for a marriage relationship, build a spiritual foundation. You don't start being a husband after you get married, you start being a husband and practicing godliness before you get married. Build a spiritual relationship with your faith.

Notice it says there *by washing with water through the word*. There's a sense of spiritual interaction that takes place when you're praying or sharing a scripture that you learned or you're serving together. You're sharing spiritually and God does something powerfully in that relationship. When husbands take spiritual initiative in the home everybody feels a sense of security, everybody feels a sense of direction. Modeling godliness in the midst of that, that's powerful.

Husbands are a balance of many character qualities all at the same time. They teach love by paying attention to the needs of others. They teach holiness by emphasizing right and wrong. They also demonstrate the encouragement and leadership of the Holy Spirit as their direction and they're guiding and they're sharing what God is doing in their lives.

Some people think that they're doing a favor by elevating their wife to number one. "You're the most important thing in my life." That's a mistake. The most important thing in our life should be God and when God is number one then it's easier to do the things for number two, our wives, that are so important. In fact, a wife will get more from her husband if she is number two and God is number one. It means, husbands, that we don't joke about our wives or make fun of them. Whether they're there or not, we're not making jokes about them. It means that we're not harsh with them. It means we're not blaming them for inconveniences or sacrifices.

Let's go on to verse 28. In the same way wives ought to love their wives *as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body.*

In verse 31 we're going to have a quote here from the Old Testament. Let me read it and we'll describe what Paul is doing because he's doing something new that was not revealed before. That's what the word 'mystery' is. Revealing something new that hadn't been revealed before. Verse 31 is a quote from Genesis. *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

In Genesis 2:24 it says, *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* And in the next verse in verse 32 it says the mystery is profound. Paul is looking at that quote and he's saying, "Wow. This is something new." See the word 'mystery' in the Bible refers to something that wasn't known before in the Old Testament but now is made known. The husband/wife relationship was true in the Old Testament. It was there. But now he's saying there's something new that's being revealed in the relationship between Christ and the church. That is the mystery that's being revealed. That's what he's talking about there. It's a mystery.

So submitting to one another as seen back there in verse 18 (*be filled with the Holy Spirit*) verse 21 says *submit to one another*. But back in verse 15 it says *live as wise not as unwise*. All of those are leading in to this whole passage here. Submitting to one another as verse 21 says is an example of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Husbands and wives who are filled with the Holy Spirit serve one another. They humble themselves and they get down low to lift the other person up. They find ways to submit their immediate preferences for comfort to the need of the other. That's what we're talking about in this whole passage.

If you look through the passage you're seeing that God is talking about being filled with the Spirit and then He jumps right into family passages to talk about the relationships and how we treat one another and what to do about that. But we have to be very careful here because if we leave the passage with only the information about both of us are to be servants, a husband and

wife must be servants, we must act loving, submitting – those are very similar words – we must do that, then we miss something about this passage.

In fact, in family ministry as we're teaching and talking about that around the country there's a term egalitarian. The term egalitarian when it comes to family ministry means there are some people who believe that's all this passage is teaching, that husband and wives are the same, they both need to sacrifice for the other person to have a successful marriage. But if we do that then we're missing something. It leaves some great ambiguity about and some confusion about the proper roles of husbands and wives in a marriage relationship. How do they work together?

Once you clarify for people that husbands and wives must be mutually humbled, mutually submissive, mutually giving and sacrificing then it's very much easier to go in and talking about the roles and relationships. Because there's a difference between a man and a woman so in the marriage relationship there's a difference between the husband and wife's role.

What distinguishes the man from the woman? What distinguishes the husband from the wife? Is it only the biological gift of child-bearing that distinguishes the two? No. After declaring the mutual submission in verse 21 there are twelve verses describing the differences between the husband and wife in the marriage relationship. You don't have to deny mutual submission to infer or form the importance of the unique role of the husband as leader in the home or the unique calling of the wife to submit to that headship.

The simplest way to see this, I think, is to look at Jesus, who was God, but when He came and was sitting at the Last Supper He got up from the table and He served and He washed the disciples' feet. He was demonstrating something very important about a godly form of leadership in the midst of acting out His role for us. You see, it is true that the husband and wife are mutually submitting and humble and so on, but they're serving in different ways.

John Piper says it this way: "When sin entered the world, it ruined the harmony of marriage not because it brought headship and submission into existence, but because it twisted man's humble, loving headship into hostile domination in some men and lazy indifference in others. It twisted woman's intelligent, happy, creative, articulate submission into manipulative obsequiousness (only John Piper could use a word like that – obsequiousness means apple polishing or groveling) in some women and brazing subordination in others. Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive.

Headship is not the right to control someone or abuse or neglect it. Leadership is not mainly a right and a privilege but a burden and a responsibility. It's a responsibility to love like Christ loved in a sacrificial way. And submission is not slavish or coerced or cowering. It's given as a gift. God has designed it for us."

So we need to lift up the divine calling of the husband. Christ calls it or the Bible calls it a mystery. The church is a mystery. This whole picture is a mystery for people to understand.

Proverbs 30:18-19 says this. Very interesting. Four things are amazing. *"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the*

way of a snake on a rock (that's why people like watching the Discovery Channel or Animal Planet, watching animals because animals are fascinating), *the way of a ship on the high seas*, and *the way of a man with a young woman*.

The dynamic between a man and a woman in a romantic relationships or a marriage relationship is special, it's amazing, it's powerful. Amazing things happen in the midst of that. That's why so many movies contain some form of romance or something in them between the dynamic between a male and a female.

It's an amazing thing. But I hope you're seeing that a successful marriage is not based on something that comes naturally. It comes spiritually. There's something that God does deep inside of a person's heart in order for them to understand what it means to serve God in a powerful way.

Socrates, four hundred years before Christ, said this (I thought this was amusing): "My advice to you is to get married. If you find a good wife, you'll be happy. If you don't, then you'll become a philosopher."

It's a mystery. It's difficult to understand. If you come into a relationship thinking that the other person is going to satisfy your needs then you're doomed from the start. Marriage is all about sacrifice.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit, men? It means pick up your clothes off the floor. That's what it means. It means that you need to fix the leaky faucet. That's what it means to be Spirit-filled in a home. It means that you take out the trash or clean out her car. It means that you're doing things that are Spirit-filled as they apply to the relationship. Because the Holy Spirit prompts you in that relationship about sacrifice and ministry and giving.

Paul says, *be filled with the Holy Spirit* then he immediately goes into the family passage so that we can understand how best to start working out our relationships, that is, work them out inside our family. If we can start working it out inside the family, God can do amazing things inside of our hearts and we can start working it out in other ways.

When some people start looking at marriage and they start studying it in the Bible, they think commitment. Marriage is about two people being committed to each other and that's what a successful marriage is.

So you start looking in the Bible for the word commitment. If you look up the word 'commitment' in the Bible you will not find it in the NIV and you will not find it in the King James Version. You will not find it in the ESV. You will not find it anywhere. The word 'commitment' isn't there.

You can start looking up the word 'commit.' And you will find the word 'commit' used like commit sin, commit adultery. Those kinds of words are used about commit. But there are a couple verses that really indicate commitment.

If you look up the word ‘commit’ here’s what you find. Proverbs 16:3 says, *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.* There’s an indicator of a successful marriage. Psalm 37:5-6, not a passage that talks about marriage, but it uses the word *commit*. What are you committing to? *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.*

So people who go to the scriptures to try to justify the idea that a successful marriage relationship is two people committed to each other will not find that. That’s not how a successful marriage relationship is achieved. A successful marriage relationship happens, it’s not built on a commitment of two people to each other, a strong marriage is built on the commitment that someone has to the Lord. When two people love the Lord and they’re committed to God, then that’s what makes this strong relationship.

That’s what God is teaching us here in this passage. Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn’t about running to the latest concert or to the latest place where some great spiritual thing is happening or listening to the latest great sermon. The most important way we can be filled with the Holy Spirit is to ask questions about our own lives. What does God want me to do right now? How does He want me to respond to Him in a powerful way?

There are two more verses I want to show you about husbands. Since we’re on the subject we may as well cover these as well. 1 Peter 3:7 says, *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner.* Let’s not get sidetracked on the weaker partner here because it’s really talking about a delicate vase, something really valuable. Not weak as in less important – *and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

The Greek word *considerate* there has to do with according to knowledge. In other words, you have to get to know your wife. I know it’s hard to understand women sometimes. It’s hard to know what they’re thinking, but as you get to know her and understand what her needs are then you’ll be able to serve her and minister to her in the way that she needs to be ministered to.

Here’s another verse. Probably a very personal one for most of us. It says, *Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.* Wow that’s interesting. Because the harshness that takes place sometimes in our thinking often leads us into some mistreatment that we have with our spouse. Don’t be harsh with them. What that means is when our wife does not meet our expectations or violates our rights or gets in our way or does something we think is not fair, the harshness becomes the spiritual indicator that I need to do something. It means something about me and my relationship with God. That’s what it’s talking about here.

Young people, I just want to talk to you for a moment. You’ve got to understand something. I know we’re talking about husbands and wives here. But if the Lord may someday allow you to be married, you must understand some things right now. Don’t wait until you’re married to start looking into these things. The reason this is so important is because marriage is made up of people who are committed to God and then practicing it in their relationship with someone else.

The most important thing that you need to understand is there are some people who are easier to serve than others. You want to make sure you're picking someone you can serve, someone you're willing to sacrifice for. That's what we're talking about. It's very important for us to think biblically about marriage. Not to just follow urges. We want to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit and allowing God to do something. We don't just want to be carried away by a motion into the momentum of a relationship; we want to choose wisely the person we're going to spend the rest of our lives with.

Some of you may be in a significant relationship right now or in a marriage relationship where you have some rather challenging things going on. Maybe you need some help with that, knowing how to work with that. I want you to be able to find that kind of support, encouragement, and help here at Calvary. Talk to me. There are other people here who are willing to help and spend time with you and care for you in the midst of a challenging relationship so that you can have some insight and some knowledge and some wisdom and some support in order to make it work. We're committed to family here.

But if you're divorced today, we're grateful that you're here. Many of you who are divorced understand the depth of the grace of God and the fact that God's mercies are new every morning and the power that God has to heal and to change and do amazing things. We're grateful that you're here. We want to be contributing any way we can to your success and your own life and in your own relationship with others.

God made us. He's the one who wrote these words in this passage. He's the one who designed this for us. If we're going to have a successful husband or a successful wife it's because their number one focus is on God, not on fixing the problem. Not on something else. It's focusing on who God is.

The second thing we need to realize is the closer we walk with God the closer that relationship can grow together in a relationship. We want to be focused on what God has for us.

Staying married is not about staying in the fall-in-love state. It's about continual work and sacrifice, keeping first things first, second things better. We want to stay in that and allow God to speak to us in some significant and powerful ways as we continue to work out those things, work out our spirituality in the midst of that relationship.

In other words, Ephesians 5:21-33 does two things. One, it guards against the abuses of headship by telling husbands to love like Jesus. It guards against the debasing of submission by telling wives to respond the way the church does to Christ. There's some elevation that takes place in the marriage relationship here because God designed it. Because God wants us to be successful in that relationship. He wants us to be able to experience what He has for us.

Headship is this. It is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home. Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's relationship and help carry it through according to her gifts.

There's a great deal at stake here. There's a tremendous amount that we can do humanly speaking in a marriage relationship. We do all that we can, but then we need to trust the Lord for the difference. We must realize that the most important thing we can do is entrust ourselves to God. Because God is the one who knows everything about us. His name is so great, His power is so great that He's the one who changes us. He gives us the ability to do what we need to do even in the most challenging of situations.

God is the one who can live those feelings when those feelings are helpful. But it's not just feelings that make love. It's the commitment, the relationship, and that only comes through the strength of God that He wants to do in our lives. So wherever we are, whether you're married, single, divorced, widowed, grandparents, whatever you are in life, every one of us needs to come before the Lord and worship Him and acknowledge Him and invite Him into more of what we need for our own lives because of who He is. That's who we are as we're coming before the Lord.

Let's continue to worship the Lord some more. Let me pray for us first.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you for what you're doing in our lives. Thank you for your love. Lord, teach us what that love is all about. We know you model that in that relationship with Christ and the sacrifice for our sins. Father, give us such a love that we are willing to embrace that in our own hearts, and demonstrate our love for you as well. Then take that into each part of our relationships, whether that's work relationships or home relationships, relationships in a family. Whatever those are we ask that you would enliven us with your Spirit. Teach us what it means to follow your Spirit in everything that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.