

Weddings!

- If I'm ever in non-Christian company and talking about what a minister does, sometimes conversation will come round to weddings
 - usually conversation is pleasant, interested... but sometimes folk ask me whether, when I marry someone, I have as the vows "love, honour and obey"
 - its always pretty clear the key word is **obey!**
- This passage in Ephesians 5, and v.22 in particular engenders some strong and negative feelings
 - maybe you've come across them... or struggled to explain what you believe in the face of at times aggressive accusations?
 - so we will spend time here this evening...
 - for the Christian, this passage declares the most profound and wonderful truths that we should celebrate and be excited about

Big Picture

- Before we look at the detail, lets get hold of the big picture:
 - *This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church.* (Eph 5:32)
 - but, hang on! as we read this verse, we may want to say "Paul, you are not talking about Christ and the Church - you are talking about marriage, about husbands and wives!"

Its about Christ and the Church

- But look closely at the verses before and it becomes clear that Paul **has** been talking about Christ and the church. Look at expressions:
 - in v.23, "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour."
 - in v.24 he writes, "as the church submits to Christ"
 - in v.25ff he 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."
 - and in v.29, "just as Christ does (ie loves) the church"
 - and then v.30, "we are members of his body (the church)."
- Right through this section then - **the big picture** - he **is** talking about **Christ and the church**:
 - its what we've seen right through this letter - and indeed throughout the Bible - its **all** about the relationship between Christ and his church
 - how Christ has won her, reconciled her, made her his own...
 - what Paul talks about here in Ephesians is what the whole universe is about!!
 - history itself is about this

What's it like, relationship between Christ and His Church?

- So Paul says, "do you want to know what this relationship is like? Between Christ and his people? Then look at the relationship between husband and wife."
 - this should be massively revealing to us if we get this big picture!
- What do we think following Jesus Christ is like?
 - do we see it as rules and regulations, or even as dead, boring religion?
 - **Ephesians 5 tells us that following Jesus Christ is in fact like the most wonderful Christian marriage**
 - we may have heard Christian speakers say Christianity is not about religion but about relationship
 - but even Christian believers can ask, "what does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus Christ?"
 - here's the answer - look at a good Christian marriage - that's the relationship you can know with Jesus Christ!
 - the most intimate relationship with anyone you can ever know, a relationship

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where you are loved unconditionally, someone who knows you warts and all and still loves you

- wonderful!

- That's how it is with Jesus - a totally secure relationship

- there is a world of difference between a relationship with Jesus and going through the motions of dead religiosity

Big Picture: practical implications

- This fundamental shift in perspective should also be exciting for our marriages:
 - our marriages are God-given visual aids to the world of the relationship available with God!
 - so it is worth investing in our marriages!
 - this is part of why God hates divorce - because it misrepresents the unbreakable love Christ has for us...
 - similarly with adultery - implies Jesus is unfaithful!
- So we invest - not to stop my marriage going wrong, but to positively speak of who Christ is!
 - investing in marriage is ministry!
 - so, do we make time with each other a priority?
- But what does this have to say to the single Christians?
 - especially those who long to be married?
 - first, marriage is never meant to be an end in itself - but to point to the bigger relationship between Christ and his people
 - marriage isn't where we define ourselves, or find all our completeness or wholeness
 - Jesus Christ is where we find those things
 - if we try to make marriage the place where we find wholeness, completeness, significance then we put an unfair burden on our spouse!
 - marriage isn't meant to be a God to us!!
 - also points to why we seek to marry well - to find a partner who will help you together point to Christ
- As a single Christian, if you want to be married...
 - ...then be developing the characteristics we find in this passage so that when you are married you will be on track for the kind of marriage that points to Christ
 - that reflects the relationship between Christ and the church!

Details

- v.22 - wives submit
 - so misunderstood - word submit
 - Do we get it from childhood memories of the wrestling on ITV?
 - I have vague memories of catching it - it wasn't something my parents really wanted me to watch!!
 - on a Saturday afternoon! (just before the footie results) Big Daddy, Giant Haystacks and the rest... Contests won with "three falls or a submission"
 - do we come with this understanding of the word submission? - something you are forced to do by someone bigger, fatter, uglier than you!
 - if this is how we understand submit, then we should be outraged by v.22! For then it becomes "Wives, give in to a bully who is bigger than you"
- But that's not it at all!
 - skip over to 1 Peter 3 (p.1219) - v.1 see what it doesn't mean - wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands... (context in 1 Peter 3 is slightly different - speaking to "mixed marriages" with non-believers especially)
 - in the same way as who?
 - example is of Jesus in chp.2, Jesus on the Cross
- And so its not about inferiority or a statement of inequality
 - Jesus was not inferior to those he submitted to at the Cross!
 - he's not unequal even to the Father

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- he submitted, but not as a lesser to a greater
- Equally, submission not a sign of weakness
 - Jesus didn't retaliate, not because he was weak but because he chose not to
 - there were legions of angels on hand!
- *Wives, in the same way, ... its neither about inequality nor weakness*
- What else can we learn about this passage from elsewhere in Scripture?
 - look Ephesians 5:31 (quoting Gen 2)
 - so Paul has the events of Genesis in his mind.... (often a verse quote "pulls in" the whole passage/incident referred to, not just the specific verse...)
 - so what happens in Genesis 2/3 in respect of the relationship between God and his people, and how that is mirrored in the relationship between man and wife?
 - see Gen 3:16 - as part of the fall, result of disobedience - "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."
- Desire in Genesis is not good - see 4:7 - sin desires to master us
 - sin desires to have us, but we must master it
 - that's surely our experience - the constant battle with sin; cf Romans 7
 - desire - wants to master you
 - as a result of the fall partners in a marriage will want to master one another
 - after the Fall, marriage no longer reflects the wonderful relationship between Christ and his church
 - the danger is that marriage degenerates into mutual attempts to master one another - to a greater or lesser extent
 - Paul says, don't go that way - wives submit, husbands love
- *Your relationships are meant to reflect Christ and the church.*
- Summary so far:
 - submission is not about inequality
 - submission is not about weakness
 - submission is about giving up the sinful desire to master another
- So far so helpful - here's the verse I find hardest!
 - *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. (Eph 5:23)*
 - headship...
 - yet I do know that I want to submit to Christ as head of the church; I don't have a problem with granting him that position, submitting to his rule as Lord
 - is this a space that we have in daily living to demonstrate what that submission to Christ looks like in our daily relationships?
 - is this fundamentally different from v.25, where husbands are addressed, or the same couched in analagous language, perhaps culturally appropriate in the 1st century?
 - there is something in Scripture of a distinction, I think, but its exact nature I struggle to discern clearly
- Worth remembering that we have moved from a **covenant of circumcision** (male/female distinction) to **covenant of baptism** (all are the same)
- And to husbands - v.25 - love - as Christ:
 - who did everything for us for our benefit (v.26-27)
 - what a wonderful Lord - that is to be our love, doing everything for our wives' good
 - this is submitting ourselves to one another....
 - we are to die for our wives - *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*
 - not the super-macho "I'd die to save my wife's life" - that's easy, its very unlikely to happen!
 - but if I won't live it out in the little things - housework? TV viewing choices?
 - if I want things my way daily, then saying I will lay down my life for her is artificial, isn't it!
- Said of a groom at a wedding, "He allows her to be who she is... he brings out the

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best in her..."

- that's what we are aiming for
- is my living for the benefit of my wife?
- if bullying and that kind of "submission" is part of what is happening in a marriage relationship, then it isn't one that Ephesians is condoning!

- "Without wrinkle" (v.27)
 - working for purity of character, not by showing up faults, but by laying down our lives.
 - eg - don't put each other down - we wouldn't put Jesus down, would we?

Conclusion

- Will we reflect on the issues this passage raises for us - particularly as couples?
- And does our relationship with the Lord look like a couple very much in love, who are devoted to one another, who delight in one another, who are affectionate and committed and self-giving and at peace with one another and the world? Who love spending time with one another? Who yearn to be back together when things have been busy?
 - or has meeting the Lord in prayer and Bible Study been sidelined, or become a chore?
- If you ask someone whether they are a Christian, you'll sometimes get answers like:
 - "I think so" or "I'm trying to be"
 - but if I were to ask you whether you were married, it'd be pretty clear!
 - there's a challenge here in how clear-cut our commitment is to Christ
 - its not a commitment to a set of rules or values - we may or may not be doing a good job at sticking to those!
 - this passage, with its comparison between a good marriage and the relationship between Christ and the church, asks us whether we have committed ourselves to Christ
 - to push the analogy, its as if at the Cross Jesus was asked "Saviour, will you take this sinner, to love him, comfort them, honour and protect them and forsaking all others be faithful to them...." - and Jesus said "I will"
 - now the question is put to us: "Sinner, will you take the Saviour, will you love him comfort them, honour and protect him and forsaking all others be faithful to him..."
 - he is waiting for us to say "I will"
- We may take time to consider - we know its wise not to rush into marriage - but the time will come to consider the nature of our relationship