

Sermon notes
8/19/07
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At the beginning of the sermon, I talked about what I talk about every week in this series – namely, how God designed marriage to depict the relationship of Christ and the church, to display his covenant faithfulness.

That is to say, your marriage is based upon *another marriage*, the marriage of Christ and the church. The whole story of the Bible is the story of boy meets girl, boy marries girl. Just as the Father brought the woman to Adam, so he gives his Son a bride. Just as Adam got his bride through a “death and resurrection” (the “deep sleep” of Gen. 2), so Jesus gets his girl by dying and rising for her.

Sometimes Jesus’ marriage to the church is a rocky one. But he sticks with her and in the end they will live “happily ever after.”

The creation story in Genesis 2 ends with a wedding because the chapter is a microcosm of history as a whole (just as Genesis 1 is a microcosm of history, ending with Sabbath). All of history will end with a wedding celebration and consummation. History is a love story – even a love song, if you will. To make our marriages run according to God’s design we have to tie our marriages into the larger story of Christ’s marriage to the church.

It is vital that we do not look at marriage through the lens of consumerism (relationships based on the “bottom line”), individualism (relationships that fit within my personal autonomy), or hedonism (relationships that bring me satisfaction or pleasure). Rather, we have to look at marriage through the lens of Scripture.

In Genesis 2, God takes one and makes two. Then he makes the two one again in marriage. And that one flesh/one person relationship is a bond created by God. We’re called to maintain that bond faithfully in order to picture God’s covenant fidelity to his people. We maintain that bond faithfully in the strength that God provides. To make marriage work, we have to rely on Christ’s faithfulness to us as members of his people.

On gender differences:

Stephen Clark, in *Man and Woman in Christ*, notes the following:

Both von Hildebrand and Stein [specialists in male/female traits] say that men and women differ in the way their minds, emotions, and bodies function together. A woman’s emotions, intellect, and body form a more integrated unity than those of a man. She confronts decisions, activities, and

relationships as an entire person – a blend of emotions, intellect, and body. On the other hand, a man’s emotions, intellect, and body are more differentiated. He more easily compartmentalizes elements of his personality, treating them as aspects of his identity which he can at times temporarily ignore.

Steven Rhoads, in the book *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, points out that the “culture wars” are really about the role of women. Instead of working to legislate away sex differences, we should look for legislation that takes those differences seriously, as an ineradicable part of the way the world is. Mothers who try their best to balance career with a desire to bond with their young inevitably get stressed. Over 50% of working mothers feel guilty about dropping their kids off at day-care. Of course, working dads never feel the same level of guilt for going outside the home to make a living, even if their jobs end up being far more demanding time-wise. Rhoads hints at a solution towards the end of the book when he suggests that evangelical Christianity’s “soft patriarchy” (in which men play the “heroic” Christ role in the marriage, using their power for the good of wife and kids) makes men and morality vital to marriage. Indeed, “soft patriarchy” holds out hope for making both men and women happy with their respective callings since it creates men who see their own honor bound up in the overall health of the family which, of course, pleases wives, who have a vested interest in familial stability and security. Civilization needs family-oriented men who lead through service, and the gospel provides them. (See especially pp. 5, 233, 262-263.)

Harvey Mansfield’s book *Manliness* has some interesting insights into manhood and gender differences. He writes, “You never hear a mother say to her son, ‘Don’t play with girls; they’re too rough’” (28). Gender differences are evident from the earliest days. He notes that men are naturally more competitive and aggressive than men in every culture. Elsewhere, he notes that studies have demonstrated that “when a woman gets married or has a child, she works less, but when a man experiences the same events, he works more.” Even in a crumbling culture like ours, men still feel an innate drive to provide security and sustenance for their families; women feel a pull to the home and children.

Emerson Eggerichs, in *Love and Respect* (p. 199), points out that whereas “Women don’t want to be told they have to work. They want the freedom to choose full-time mothering and/or a career,” by comparison, “Most men feel that work is not an option. Comedian Tim Allen has observed that women have all kinds of choices. Men have one: ‘Work or go to jail.’” There is no getting around the reality that men are more oriented to work, and women are more oriented to family. A “family man” in the classic sense of the term is a man who works hard outside the home to provide for his wife and kids. You might say he’s family oriented, but that orientation *to* the home takes him *out of* the home to subdue the earth and carve out a living. A woman, on the other had, finds her center of gravity in the home, even if her work takes her out of the home at times. The home remains (or at least should remain) her first priority.

The Bible doesn't say a woman's *place* is the home, but it does say her *priority* should be the home (e.g., Titus 2:1-4). We should not legalistically demand that woman stay at home all the time, or refuse employment outside of the home. Situations vary. However, we also note that biblical wisdom insists that a woman make sure that she is the primary caregiver for her children. Too often in our culture, double income families are structured to provide a number of luxuries, not necessities. There is no material benefit that can outweigh the blessings of a mom who gets to devote most of her time to raising her own children. There is no substitute for a mother's love.

In addition, it's been demonstrated repeatedly that the real long term financial gains of having a wife work during the years when the children are still at home are very marginal.

The husband's call to die for his wife (that is, to give himself for her *just as* Christ gave himself for the church) may seem a bit unrealistic. After all, most (though admittedly not all) of us live in relative safety. We live in a safe nation with safe neighborhoods. So what does this look like in daily life? How can a husband be a hero and give himself for his wife?

It's actually in the little things. The way he treats her, the way he helps her, the way he deals with the children, the way he does chores – all these things communicate to her whether or not he's willing to die for her. Perhaps Romans 12 is the best commentary on Ephesians 5 – a husband is to be *a living sacrifice* in the marriage relationship.

My question for Christian spouses: Would people be able to figure out your theology by simply observing your marriage for a few days? Husbands, could an observer derive an orthodox Christology and soteriology from the way you treat your wife? Wives, could an observer derive an orthodox ecclesiology from the way you relate to your husband? Could the observer arrive at something like the doctrine of the Trinity by examining your equal-but-different pattern of life?

Frankly, I am surprised that no one accused the sermon of being a mass of contradictions (e.g., husbands as heads, wives as house despots). It was admittedly a *very* nuanced sermon. But I think the Bible's teaching on these things is full of nuance. Hopefully the nuance in the sermon reflects biblical wisdom, even if there seem to be some tension points. We have to learn to live within that tension.

Consider the nuances: the man is the head (Eph. 5), but the woman is the "house despot" (1 Tim. 5:14). The wife was made for her husband (1 Cor. 11) and yet they share equally in Christ's redemption (Gal. 3:27). The husband is to rule his home (Eph. 5-6), but in the bedroom the husband and wife have equal authority over one's another's bodies (1 Cor. 7). Etc. The Biblical view always has layers of complexity and flexibility that should not be negated.

Thus, the biblical view of marriage and gender does not fit neatly into either liberal or conservative boxes, as we know them. Christianity comes neither from the right, nor from the left, but (as Tim Keller says) “from above.” Part of the church’s calling today is to show a gender confused world what redeemed manhood and womanhood look like.

In the sermon, I talked about how both liberal and conservatives do not really do justice to the Bible’s teaching on the differences between men and women. Liberals tend to deny those differences, conservatives tend to exaggerate and rigidify them.

I need to spell that out with regard to liberalism a little bit more. In the sermon, I only talked about “classic” feminism. Classic (or “first wave”) feminism denied that men and women are really different, *and* impelled women to model themselves after men (e.g., put career first, ahead of family; aggressively pursue multiple sex partners). Some have pointed out that classic feminism is really “masculinism” since it makes traditional manhood the norm (parodied as “men are scumbags and women should try to be more like them”). Feminists, ironically, hate true femininity.

As I said in the sermon, classic feminism has not really aged well. For one thing, women found that careers – however successful – did not fully satisfy them. Many, many women found that the desire for children persisted. For another thing, science has repeatedly demonstrated what we knew from the Scriptures all along, namely, that men and women really are different (see, e.g., Steven Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*).

The failure of classic feminism gave rise to a new wave of feminism. In this brand of feminism, differences between men and women are acknowledged....and women are declared superior. The feminine standard becomes the norm. You can see this kind of feminism in the widespread emasculation and feminization of our culture. Of course, this kind of feminism has had disastrous consequences for everyone involved – men, women, and children (especially boys).

Finally, there is now a more radical postmodern feminism, which says gender is a totally “plastic” concept. Gender as we have known it is a cultural construct. Boys and girls are not innately different; rather, we have programmed them to be different. There are no masculine or feminine “givens.” Rather, the concept of gender was created by the physically stronger to oppress the weaker. The goal of postmodern feminism is a unisex, gender neutral society (brought about through legislation and technology).

But someone has to be really out of touch with reality to be attracted to the postmodern version of feminism. Gender simply isn’t that plastic (and once again, science is firmly on the side of the Bible and the traditionalists). The very fact that women get pregnant and nurse, and men can’t, is proof that sexes are innately different. The differences are woven into the very fabric of things. Not even a perverted use of technology allows for a full interchangeability of men and women.

For the most part, all these different permutations of feminism can be blamed on bad fathers and husbands and who made women distrust and even hate men.

Instead of trying to rank the sex differences or negate them, we should appreciate them for what they are. It is certainly true physically that the differences are what attract the genders to each other. But this should ultimately be true holistically.

Headship can be unpacked by looking at a variety of Scriptures that deal with the concept.

For example, Jdg. 11:11 shows us that headship means leadership. Kings and judges are heads of their people.

Eph. 1:22 shows us that headship includes authority. Christ is head over all things for the sake of the church – he rules everything for her ultimate benefit.

Eph. 5 shows headship involves responsibility. Jesus exercised headship by taking responsibility for the sins of his bride and dealing with them. He takes responsibility to protect and provide for his bride. Husbands must do the same.

The word for “submission” in Eph. 5 is actually a military term, used to describe hierarchy. The word literally means “to place in order under another.” Given its military background, the word includes “giving obedience and allegiance,” the way a faithful soldier serves his commanding officer. For wives, submission means they support and obey their husbands so that they can be victorious on the battlefield of life. A submissive wife is one who aligns herself with her husband.

I made reference in the sermon to the man’s call to be the primary physical provider. This duty is especially emphasized in 1 Tim. 5, where Paul says that a man who will not care for his own family is “worse than an unbeliever.” As I said, we have to make various allowances in this (e.g., a disabled man, a man preparing to provide while in grad or med school, etc.). But bottom line is this: the task of figuring out how to make ends meet falls to the man.

The man is the fundamental breadwinner, but this does mean his wife should treat him as a meal ticket. One aspect of respect is appreciating and praising his efforts to provide (however meager the fruit of his labor turns out to be). Wives need to learn to be content with the provision God makes for them through their husbands.

Gender is a highly mysterious thing. How can we be the same yet different? Of course, the mystery of gender is ultimately rooted in the Trinity, which is mysterious (1 Cor. 11). In marriage, somehow, I find this other person is *wholly other* – and yet also *wholly one*

with me. This other person is incomprehensible to me – and yet I find myself and understand myself in the other.

Just to follow up further on the husband's responsibility to provide and protect:

Exodus 21:10-11 shows "the basics" a man is responsible to provide, namely, food, clothing (remember, she is his glory, and thus should be able to dress attractively!), and conjugal rights (cf. 1 Cor. 7). A lot of men spend way too much of the family budget on their own "toys," and their wives are left with somewhat meager or inadequate resources to care for the rest of the family. Such husbands need to learn to practice self-denial.

Neh. 4:14 shows godly men called upon to fight on behalf of their wives and children. A man is called to put himself between his wife and any threat or danger. A man is responsible (at a creaturely level) for the all-around safety and well-being of his wife.

Here's a story about a husband's provision and a wife's respect:

Dr. E. V. Hill recently has gone on to be with the Lord. He was a dynamic black minister who served as senior pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles. He lost his wife, Jane, to cancer a few years ago. At her funeral, Dr. Hill described some of the ways she had made him a better man. As a struggling young preacher, E. V. had trouble earning a living. E. V. came home one night and found the house dark. When he opened the door, he saw that Jane had prepared a candlelight dinner for two. He thought that was a great idea and went into the bathroom to wash his hands. He tried unsuccessfully to turn on the light. Then he felt his way into the bedroom and flipped another switch. Darkness prevailed. The young pastor went back to the dining room and asked Jane why the electricity was off. She began to cry.

"`You work so hard, and we're trying,' said Jane, `but it's pretty rough. I didn't have enough money to pay the light bill. I didn't want you to know about it, so I thought we would just eat by candlelight.'

"Dr. Hill described his wife's words with intense emotion: `She could have said, "I've never been in this situation before. I was reared in the home of Dr. Caruthers, and we never had our lights cut off." She could have broken my spirit; she could have ruined me; she could have demoralized me. But instead she said, "Somehow or other

we'll get these lights back on. But tonight, let's eat by candlelight."

For more on “despot housewives,” see Doug Wilson, *My Life for Yours*, 13-14. The term used in 1 Timothy. 5:14 is used elsewhere to describe authority (e.g., Mt. 10:25), so I don’t think my sermon applications can be argued. To be a wife is to be in a position of genuine authority.

A very partial bibliography on headship and submission:

Christopher Ash, *Married for God*, especially ch. 5. I really like this book. It has an excellent discussion of the shape of marriage on pages 81ff, including sinful distortions that twist marriage out of shape.

Doug Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, ch. 2-3. I read this book before I got married and it really helped me sort through some things. Wilson focuses on inescapable headship – the headship of the husband is an indicative, not an imperative, so the only question is “*how* will he lead?” The man is to be a small pebble, picturing the Rock that is Christ. Wilson also points out that when a woman submits to her husband, it actually protects her from having to submit to other men. Submission is good news!

Doug Wilson, *For a Glory and a Covering*, chap. 7-10: Wilson says that the heart of masculinity is authority which takes responsibility sacrificially. He sums up the husband’s masculine headship in these categories: authority, sacrifice, responsibility, initiative. He sums up femininity as submission, obedience, gratitude, and responsiveness.

Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect*. While this book lacks a fully covenantal understanding of what headship means, it is very winsome and practical guide to how to live faithfully in marriage.

The differences between men and women mean that even when they do the same thing, they will do it differently. This is obvious in both the workplace and at home. A man and a woman can each be given the same job. They will do it differently, even though they may both do it very well. Gender differences color and shape everything we do.

As I said in the sermon, the headship/submission pattern goes back to creation. It is woven into the fabric of creation from the beginning.

How, then, has the fall corrupted this pattern? A man’s headship under the influence of sin will either be abdicated or abused. He will either passively let his wife ruler over the home, or he will become oppressive and tyrannical. A woman’s submissive helper role is

corrupted by sin so that she either tries to manipulate her husband and control him, or she becomes excessively dependent and *helpless*.

Because of sin, it is not as simple as telling men to rule their homes, or telling women to submit to their husbands. Sin complicates things, and redemptive grace is necessary to bring restoration. Husbands have to be told to rule *just as* Christ rules over the church (that is, by giving himself up for her). Women have to be instructed to submit in the fear of the Lord (not unconditionally!), allowing their loyalty to Christ to control the shape of their submission to their husbands. Redeemed headship shows itself in a loving, sacrificial exercise of authority. Redeemed submission shows itself in respect and obedience that are truly helpful to her husband.

I quoted Chesterton towards the end of the sermon. Here is that line in full context (see *Brave New Family*, 144):

Now the old human family, on which civilisation is built, meant this when it talked about its “head.” It has nothing to do with detailed despotism or the control of other’s people’s daily lives. This is quite another and later idea, arising out of the crazy complexity of all high civilisations. If authority means power (which it does not), I think the wife has more of it than the husband. If I look round any ordinary room at all the objects – at their color, choice, and place – I feel as if I were a lonely and stranded male in a world made wholly by women. All the same, if a canvasser comes to urge the cause of the Conservative-Radicals, or of the Radical-Conservatives, it is I who ought to see him. If a drunkard has wandered into my front garden and lain down on the principal flower-bed, it is I who ought to inspect him. If a burglar wanders about the house at night, it is I who ought to parley with him. Because I am the head; I am the tiresome excrescence that can talk with the world.

Slight correction:

At one point in the sermon, I was talking about how men and women are different and I pointed to the creation account in Genesis. I said that, for Adam, the job came first. Adam was given a job before he was given a wife. The job is given in Gen. 2:15; the wife is given in 2:22. For the woman, the relationship comes first. At one point I said the woman was married “on the same day” she was created. Of course, that was also true of the man. Both the man and the woman were created and married on day 6 of the creation week. What I meant to say is that the woman was married “in the same hour” as she was created. Genesis 2:21ff seems indicate that God brought the woman to the man right after he created her.

Ephesians 5:21-33 should be read as an overlay of Genesis 2. Paul talks about love and respect in Eph. 5. This is another way of getting at the roles already assigned in Gen. 2, where the man is the Namer and the woman is the Helper. Adam names the animals and then names his wife in Gen. 2. Naming is an act of authority (e.g., in the Bible, parents name children; God changes people's names; victorious kings rename those they have subjected; etc.). Naming is a form of headship. At the same time, we must note that he names her in a way that doesn't degrade her but gives her a glorious position. In Gen. 2, the woman is given to the man to help him to fulfill his calling. Wives should help in such a way that they do not try to do their husband's job for them, but enable them to do what they're called to do. To help is to submit and respect. To help is to empower and enable.

So the teaching on marital roles in Gen. 2 and Eph. 5 converge (that is, creation and redemption converge). In both texts we see how men and women complete one another: The woman completes the man by enabling him to powerfully take dominion and subdue the earth. The man completes the woman by relating to her in sacrificial love. Neither man nor woman is self-sufficient or independent of the other.

I didn't really get to talk about singles in the sermon. Singles may wonder: How do I get direction and definition in my life without a husband? How do I get help without a wife to be my helper?

The reality is that Jesus is both of those for you (and in an ultimate sense, for everyone in his church). In Eph. 5, he is the head of the whole church. In 1 Cor. 11, he is model helper, who lives in submission to his Father. In a sense, Jesus becomes our paradigm for both masculinity (as he gives himself to and for his bride, the church) and femininity (as he shows the true meaning of submission by submitting to his Father; note also that he called his Spirit a "Helper" to his people in John 14:16). Compared to Jesus, none of us is nearly as masculine or as feminine as we ought to be. The important point for singles is this: Compared to Jesus, no earthly spouse is the head or helper that he/she ought to be. Only Jesus can fulfill those roles in an ultimate sense. Singles are completed by Jesus – just as we all are in the most ultimate sense.

{It may sound strange, and even backwards to suggest that Jesus, a man, could be the model of the feminine. And this does need nuancing. See Doug Wilson, *For Glory and a Covering*, 40f for a good explanation of how men are actually called upon to relate in a feminine submissive way in some relationships – just as woman are called to act in an authoritative, masculine way in certain relationships.)

The gender specific commands to love and respect can be seen as applications of the broader command to love your neighbor as yourself (note that your spouse is your closest neighbor). The wife is to love in a context of respect (Tit. 2:4), and the husband is to respect/honor in a context of love (1 Pt. 3:7).

Eph. 5:26 is an odd verse that I have never quite been able to figure out. How can husbands wash their wives with water by the Word? Most good commentators recognize that the allusion to washing points to baptism. Christ washes the church in baptism, which includes a promise, granted in the Word.

How does that carry over to what husbands are supposed to do? This is what comes to mind:

Water and Word represent the means of grace. (“Nourish” in v. 29 could be taken as a reference to feeding/provision, and thus could bring communion into the picture as well.) A husband is to do for his wife what baptism, the Word, and communion do for the church. He is to forgive his wife, teach his wife, feed his wife, make promises to his wife, give assurance and security to his wife, etc. In short, he is to be a human means of grace to her, an agent of the sanctifying grace of God.