

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
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Heaven on Earth\_ Ephesians 5 Me to We  
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In June of 1976, a massive explosion leveled half a city block in Los Angeles, killed nine people. That explosion was caused by an 18 inch miscalculation. While excavating the 9500 block of Venice Boulevard, someone cut into a petroleum pipeline, released thousands of gallons of gasoline. It was not the first or last accident of its kind, but the enormity of that tragedy, catalyze the codification of color coded utility markings. If you live in an urban area, you've seen sidewalks spray painted with red and yellow and green markings. I'll be honest, those markings were a mystery to me, even a little irritating to me, you know, you get a new sidewalk and the next thing you know, its street graffiti all over it. Well, now I know why and it makes common sense. Those markings map this underground network of pipes and wires and tubes that crisscross every city in America. Red represents electric, yellow denotes gas, orange is telecommunications, green signifies sewer. It's those color coded utility markings that help excavators steer clear of sub surface hazards.

This weekend, we continue our series 'Heaven on Earth'. We get to the end of Ephesians five and it's almost like the Apostle Paul takes out a can of spray paint and he marks the sidewalk. He gives us these color coded markings that help us navigate relationships by revealing some of those subsurface hazards. Scholars would call these relational guidelines, household codes, you've got husbands and wives, parents and children and in that culture, masters and slaves. The book of Ephesians is all about the heavenly realm becoming our earthly reality. And Paul reveals what that looks like in our relationships.

If you have a Bible, you can meet me in Ephesians five, and we'll start in verse 21. Now the goal this weekend is to dig down and lay down the groundwork for happy, healthy holy relationships. We'll focus on marriage but these principles of love and respect and submission don't just hold true down the aisle. I think they hold true across the aisle. Ready or not here we go.

Verse 21, *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."*

Now notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say submit to one another out of reverence for one another. No, we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ - big difference. Marriage is an unconditional commitment between two imperfect people. And it's not a one way street. Paul is advocating this egalitarian idea of mutual submission. It's pretty radical in the first century, patriarchal society. Submission is a two way street. They're 59 one and other statements in the New Testament, love one another, honor one another, encourage one another. Verse 21 is one of those one another's but let me back up just a little bit because you actually have back to back one anothers. Verse 21 says, submit to one another but it follows on the heels of verse 19, which says, sing to one another.

Now we touched on verse 19 last week, we've got a prophesy our praise. But let me dig just a little deeper. Worship is two dimensional. There is this vertical dimension where we sing to God but there is also this horizontal dimension where we sing to each other and with each other. Worship is one way that we one another. I think it's a great way to bear one another's burdens. It's a great way to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. I'm grateful during this COVID crisis, that technology has enabled us to worship virtually. But one of the things I miss most about our in person gatherings is this supernatural synergy we experience when we physically worship with one another in the same place, in the same space. That day is going to come and we'll be a lot less likely to take it for granted after this COVID crisis

Now we're talking about marriage so let me have a little bit of fun with this and make it personal. Lora and I started dating when we were teenagers. And I fell in love with Lora, for lots of reasons. One of them is the way she worships. I love worshipping with my wife. Some of you know Lora led worship at NCC during our first decade. She actually majored in music. But it's not her musical gifts or her musical skills that I fell in love with. Lora worships with this intensity, worships with this authenticity that makes me want to worship God the way she does. I think one of the big mistakes we make in marriage is wanting our spouse to worship us. Now, we would never say that but I think a lot of us subconsciously think that our spouse is going to solve all of our problems or meet all of our egoic needs. Well, good luck with that. I have counseled a lot of couples. I've officiated a lot of weddings. In my humble opinion, a lot of people go into marriage, hoping that it will somehow be the missing piece of their puzzle. In the immortal words of Dorothy Boyd to Jerry Maguire, "You complete me." Listen, that is setting yourself up for disappointment.

For the record, the most complete person to walk this planet was single. His name is Jesus. If you marry someone to make up for what you do not possess, as an individual, you are asking that person to do something that's impossible. You're giving them an impossible burden to bear. The secret to intimacy with another person says Craig Barnes is discovering the sufficiency of God's love without that person. We have to find our identity, find our sufficiency in Christ alone. And the amazing thing is this, now you don't have to play God. Now you don't have to be the Messiah. Now you can be your perfectly imperfect self. In their book, Boundaries in Marriage Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend say this, "The requirement for ONENESS is two complete persons. To the degree that either is LESS THAN COMPLETE as a person, the oneness will suffer under the strain of incompleteness."

Let me zoom out right here. In Ephesians, five, marriage is a chiasm. A chiasm is a mirror image. Another way of saying it is that marriage is an icon. An icon is something that represents something else. Now in this instance, marriage is an earthly representation of this eternal reality, called the Trinity and I'll double back to that idea. But you have to be very careful that this icon doesn't become in idol, two very different things. An idol is something you love, something you trust, something you value more than God. Again, it's asking your spouse to do for you what only Christ can. On that note, the goal of marriage is not happiness; the goal of marriage is holiness, which is a very different target.

All right, let me double back to this idea of chiasm. Marriage is an earthly representation of this eternal reality called the Trinity. The Trinity is one God, three persons. Marriage is two bodies becoming one flesh. Paul says it this way in verse 31. *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*<sup>32</sup> *This mystery is profound—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*” Marriage symbolizes the at-onement we experienced with God the Father through Christ, the Son. And so marriage is a mystery and a mirror.

Now let me back up a little bit. Verses 22 through 28 say this, <sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.* <sup>24</sup> *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* <sup>26</sup> *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,* <sup>27</sup> *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* <sup>28</sup> *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”*

Paul is flipping the script on the Ephesians, he is instigating a sexual revolution, he is advocating a sexual ethic that does not conform to the pattern of this world. It goes all the way back to God's original intent, God's original design.

Now I'll do some reverse engineering but let me just share one piece of advice that 28 years of marriage has taught me. If you focus on getting your needs met by your spouse, marriage becomes a mirage and you will be miserable. Why? Because then marriage becomes all about you. You have to flip that script and focus on meeting the needs of your spouse. All of that to say this, it's a lot easier submitting to one another when you're singing with each other or singing to each other. When you make music it helps you meet in the middle, and that includes the bed.

Now that brings us all the way back to verse 21. *“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”* This is one of those ideas that gets used and abused in ways that was never intended. It has nothing to do with inferiority or superiority. It doesn't give license to masculism, or feminism. Paul is advocating mutual submission, which is counterintuitive and counterculture.

Now we are all about advocating for our rights. And please hear me anything less than equal rights is wrong. But submission is the exact opposite. The word literally means to yield the right of way. Now in our culture, it's my way or the highway, right? In the kingdom it's not my will but Thy will be done that is the Jesus way. The first will be last. The greatest of all, is the servant of all. If someone asks you to go one mile, it's going the extra mile. It's not about me, it's about we. It's giving someone else the seat of honor. Submission, is giving up your rights for the sake of someone else. Submission is leveraging your

privilege for other people. Submission is sacrificing your life for someone else. Jesus sets the standard. It's epitomized by his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. On the eve of his execution, he says not my will, but Thy will be done. Submission is giving God veto power then and only then, are we ready, willing and able to submit to one another. When you are controlled by the Holy Spirit you don't have to control everyone and everything around you.

If you're experiencing conflict in your marriage, it might be a submission issue. All of us bring unique strengths, unique weaknesses into our relationships. We bring different personalities, different passions, different perspectives. In my experience, submission is a trust issue. Do I trust Lora enough to submit to her strengths, to her wisdom, and vice versa? All right, let me switch gears. Submission is a manifestation of a Spirit filled, Spirit led life. It sets the table for happy, healthy, holy matrimony. And I think it helps us avoid some of these subsurface hazards.

Let me dig just a little deeper and we'll be done. Last week, I shared an update on phase two of our construction at the Turnaround. We're building out 20,000 square feet of kid's ministry space and Child Development Center. We're going to lay the foundation of faith for thousands of kids in the years to come. Baby's not yet conceived. We'll hear the good news, Psalm 22:31. Now the delivery date, as of right now is April 2021. And part of the reason why it's taking a little bit longer than planned is that we decided to dig down so that we could build up. We've got about an acre and a half on top of us, but the buildings 130 years old, which meant we had to reinforce the footers in the foundation.

Couple of fun facts, we drilled 109 micropiles, about 45 feet deep. If you laid them end to end, it would be 10 times taller, than the Washington Monument. We've added 30,374 pounds of steel rebar, 28 tons of structural steel, and we'll pour 20 truckloads of concrete. Why? Because if you want to build up you have to dig down. Micropiles transfer the structural load of a building through unsuitable layers of soil down to a more solid foundation.

Now there are a few reasons to reinforce - one, again, you have to dig down to build up. But there's another common reason and it's something called seismic retrofitting. I mean, come on, you tell me the tectonic plates of culture are shifting. We need some theological micropiles that keep us grounded. Why? So we aren't tossed to and fro, so we aren't blown here and there by every wind of doctrine, Ephesians 4:14. We need to stay grounded in God's word.

If you micropile through the layers of culture, you end up in Genesis 2:18. And God says this, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now one common misconception about this passage is that by calling woman a helper she is somehow subservient to her male counterpart. The Hebrew word for helper is ezer, and it means to rescue, to save, to help. It appears 21 times in the Old Testament, and it's used in three basic ways.

\*\*One, it refers to an ally who provides military aid. Two it refers to God Himself. Psalm 121, I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my ezer come from? My ezer comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And three, it refers to a wife and her husband.

Now the very next word suitable comes from the Hebrew word, nagad, it means corresponding to or opposite of. It's almost like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that fit perfectly together. There are those who would eliminate the biological and psychological differences between men and women. But to do so, I think devalues God's original intent, and I might add it ignores science. We certainly believe in equal worth, equal opportunity, equal rights. But there are differences between men and women and that is something that we celebrate. "Without the awareness that we are supposed to be different", said John Gray, "men and women are at odds with each other. We usually become angry or frustrated with the opposite sex because we have forgotten this simple truth. We expect the opposite sex to be more like ourselves. Men mistakenly expect women to think communicate and react the way men do. Women mistakenly expect men to feel, communicate and respond the way women do. We have forgotten that we are supposed to be different."

Now I know that that is not without controversy but gender is not a social construct. Gender is divine design. If we micropile just a little deeper Genesis 1:27 says this. "*So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (then)*"<sup>28</sup> God blessed them." We have three theologies in this one verse.

- One, you have a theology of dignity. It says God created human beings in His own image. And then it doubles down in the image of God he created them. You are made in the imago dei. That is ground zero for those of us who follow Christ. We treat everyone, especially those we disagree with, as invaluable and irreplaceable. Why? Because we all bear the image of Almighty God. The image of God in me greets the image of God in you.
- Two - We have a theology of blessing - Then God blessed them. Before original sin, there was original blessing. Blessing is God's most ancient instinct. God wants to bless you beyond your ability to ask or imagine and when he does, our job is to flip that blessing for someone else.
- And three, we have a theology of sexuality - male and female, he created them. Marriage is not a social construct or a legal contract. Marriage is a sacred covenant between a husband and a wife till death do us part. Anything less anything else, devalues God's original intent. Paul is elevating this idea of marriage. Now, don't make it in idol, but it is an icon.

I am almost out of time and we are just scratching the surface. So let me close with verses 25 and 26. "*25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*"<sup>26</sup> *so that he might sanctify her, (How?) having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."*

We read right past this, but the Ephesians knew exactly what Paul was referencing. Ancient Ephesus was a city that celebrated sexuality in any and every form and fashion, no holds barred. There were idols to Artemis all over the city. She even had her own temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Every year, the Ephesians would celebrate the Festival of Artemis, they would take to the streets and they would parade the statue of Artemis, almost like a float in the Macy's Day Parade. They would march down to the harbor, and they would actually baptize the goddess of fertility. They would wash the statue with water, believing that it somehow ritually restored her virginity. By the time they got back to the temple, which doubled as a brothel. They had lost their virginity all over again.

Now, what does that have to do with these verses? Paul is flipping the script on the Ephesians. He is calling these Christians to live counterculture. How? Well in a culture where there were very few sexual boundaries, Paul is advocating for monogamy with this metaphor. Sex is a sacred covenant between a husband and a wife. And what's so beautiful about that is this, when you have sex as a married couple, you are renewing the vows you made with one another.

Now, I know, there is a lot of sexual confusion. There's a lot of sexual brokenness, a lot of sexual abuse in our culture. There's a lot of shame, a lot of regret, a lot of hurt. I don't want anything that I have said this weekend to sound like condemnation. Listen; there is no condemnation in Christ. We're just not a church that focuses on past tense mistakes. But listen, we're going to cast the vision for what we believe is biblical sexuality and part of that is sexual purity.

When you reverse engineer this idea of marriage, when you micropile, all the way down, you have this beautiful chiasm, this beautiful icon of the way it was meant to be. Paul, again, elevating the status of sex. Paul is elevating the idea of marriage. Paul is instigating this sexual revolution that we're part of. It's this countercultural approach to sexuality. And listen, it's as counterintuitive now, as it was then.

Now, there's this incident recorded in John's gospel where a woman is caught in the act of adultery, which is way beyond awkward. The religious leaders are ready to stone this woman to death. And I love what Jesus says what Jesus does. He says he who was without sin cast the first stone. It is so easy for us to point the finger isn't it? It's so easy to just stand back and throw stones. Jesus does the exact opposite. He comes to the defense of this woman who has just been unfaithful to her husband. He is not condoning adultery, but that doesn't keep him from defending this woman's - what? Dignity. You can stoner over my dead body. Jesus shows tremendous compassion but he also shows conviction. He then turns to this woman and says, "*Go and sin no more.*" We need the moral courage to live according to our biblical convictions. We need the moral courage to show unconditional love to those who don't agree with those convictions. That's not easy. It's not always popular but that is what God has called us. to.

I know this is so personal. This is so emotional. Some of us need counseling. Some of us need prayer. Some of us need a miracle. Whatever you need this weekend I want to pray for you right here, right now.

Where there is sexual hurt God I pray, healing. Where there is sexual shame God I pray freedom. Where there is sexual confusion I pray wisdom. Where there is sexual sin I pray for forgiveness. Where there is sexual abuse God I pray grace and I pray it in Jesus name. Amen.