

Assault On God's Design for Marriage

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-98

Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 5 and we're looking at the divine pattern for relationships. This is part two in our series on the family, on marriage, and raising children. We're going to get into a lot of wonderful things in the weeks ahead. And we're looking at a sort of a launch pad in Ephesians chapter 5, a great place to begin this study because the Word of God is so specific with regard to these matters.

I want to read to you from verses 18 through 21, Ephesians chapter 5. "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father, and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

Last week we said that the foundation of all Christian family success, all Christian marriage blessing is set out in that text. It's not gimmicky, it's not trivial, it's not superficial, it's not manipulative. What it says is that before we can even talk about wives in verse 22, before we can talk about husbands in verse 25, before we can talk about children in chapter 6 verse 1 and parents in chapter 6 verse 2, we have to set up some foundations for all of those relationships, namely this, you must be Spirit filled, singing, saying thanks and submissive. And we focused on those four things last time. Where you have filling of the Spirit which means you're under the control of the Holy Spirit by obedience to the Word, where you have overflowing joy that comes out in songs, where you have constant thanks for everything and where you have mutual submission, you have the foundations of happiness, success and blessing in a marriage and in a family. All of that is built on that spiritual foundation, whether we're talking about husband and wife relationship, or children and parents.

One of the most popular books on this subject over the last few years was titled, *Pillars That Support A Fulfilling Marriage*. At the time that it first came out it was a very popular book. And the book suggests that what is foundational to marriage, what really makes a marriage successful is five pillars. Here's what the book suggested, a Christian book, by the way. Number one is security. Number two is communication. Number three is romance. Number four is touch. And number five is intimacy of spirit.

The book says things like this, quote: "If a woman truly wants to have meaningful communication with her husband, she must cultivate the right side of his brain." It says this, "The best way we know to

bond within a family is by going camping." Pretty shallow suggestions, wouldn't you say? I'm not quite sure how the right side of my brain works, I'm positive my wife has no clue...and I'm really not much for camping either, as a matter of fact.

I would expect that kind of thing in a secular book, I just am shocked to read it in a Christian book. The pillars of marriage are not security, communication, romance, touch and intimacy of spirit. The pillars of a marriage are being Spirit-filled, having an overflowing joy, being thankful for everything and mutually submissive.

The Bible says that families are built on spiritual foundations, not psychological ones, not emotional ones. The Bible says that what is most important in a good marriage is love for God overruling love for self. What is really important in a good marriage is the pursuit of the needs of others rather than your own. What really matters is having a submissive heart that cares more about the other, true spiritual joy, gratitude, devotion to God and His Kingdom and His purposes and His glory, true holiness, obedience to Scripture.

In other words, marriage is just a place where you live your Christianity. And if you live it right, it's a happy, productive, fulfilled and blessed event every day. If you don't, it is fraught with pain and disappointment and unfulfillment and sadness and anger and all the rest. It has nothing to do with some human techniques of touch, or romance, or intimacy, or communication, or even financial security, and everything to do with your relationship to God.

In fact, there is no better place, no more important place for you to live out your Christianity than in your home. And if your home isn't what God wants it to be, it is because the highest standards of Christianity are not being carried out there. It may be that one partner is making every endeavor to do that and the other is not, it may be that both are falling short. In either case, great difficulty results.

The family is the environment where your spiritual strength, your spiritual devotion, your spiritual consistency are most manifest. And not only most manifest but, listen to this, most demanded. Because of familiarity, because of being together all the time under every conceivable kind of circumstance and in every trial and difficulty, the home is the truest test, your marriage is the truest test of your spiritual life. That is why in 1 Timothy chapter 3 it says about an elder, a pastor, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity, but if a man doesn't know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" Simply what Paul is saying is he manifests the character of his Christian commitment, he manifests his spiritual leadership in the home, and if it isn't showing up there, why would you ask him to lead the church?

A family is just the most significant place where you live out your faith. I'll even go so far as to say, instruction with regard to the techniques of marriage, if that's a word that's appropriate, instruction

with regard to the skills of marriage, instruction with regard to all of the nuances of sensitivity toward male and female differences, when you've added all that up it is of minimal significance. It seems to be that today we would assume that it's the main theme and the main necessity because so much literature and so much effort has been devoted to it. But it is really not of grave importance if you have two Spirit-filled, joyful, thankful, submissive, godly people. It all starts with that spiritual foundation and apart from that there is major trouble and major conflict.

And the reason I'm emphasizing this is because this is where it all begins, this is where it all succeeds and this is where it all breaks down. In fact, the whole wonderful design for marriage won't work very well where there is sin. When you invade that domain of marriage and family with sin, it becomes a very oppressive, unfulfilling, miserable experience. And that's how it is for most people, certainly the unregenerate world today that has been fed a steady diet of justification for personal pride and personal fulfillment has sowed the seeds that destroy all relationships finally. They're all crushed under the weight of pride. And even this has effected the church. Those of us who know the truth have a difficult time living it because we are inundated with the world around us.

In fact, I suppose the term "conflict" is almost synonymous with marriage and family today. We hear all the time about how oppressive men are, how insensitive they are, how chauvinistic they are, how abusive and uncaring they are. And on the other hand, we hear so often about women being overbearing, seeking freedoms and the exercise of their own will and their own purposes and not wanting to submit to their husbands. And why is this? Well it's because of sin.

And maybe we could go back to the beginning and get a glimpse of this. Turn back in your Bible to the third chapter of Genesis. I want to share with you what may well be an interpretation of Genesis 3 worthy of consideration. I cannot be dogmatic and say it is absolutely unequivocally accurate. There are some who would take issue with any effort to be dogmatic in this regard but is at least an interesting possibility in understanding where the conflict comes from. We know, of course, it comes from selfishness, it comes from personal pride and personal sin. That's what makes relationships difficult, certainly in the family. But there may be another element to this conflict of very great interest. And if we look at Genesis chapter 3, let me call you to Genesis 3 verse 13. "And the Lord said to the woman, 'What is this you've done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me and I ate.' And the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field, on your belly shall you go and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise Him on the heel.'" That being the curse of Satan.

But now the woman, verse 16, "To the woman He said," here's the penalty you're going to pay and this is for all womankind, "To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.'"

The curse obviously that came upon the human race as a result of the Fall in Eden altered significantly and dramatically the original design of God. Before sin there was perfect union. There was no conflict. Adam and Eve got along perfectly. And sin was introduced and sin brought with it chaos and conflict.

Now there were several features to this curse. There was a separation between man and God as a result of sin. And man, you remember, was thrown out of the Garden, and intimate and free and full communion with God was ended. There was also a separation between man and nature. No longer would nature yield all of its bounty to man without any effort on his part. Now he had to go out and by the sweat of his brow he had to till the soil and work very hard to make the world yield to him what once had gave him so freely.

Separation between man and God, separation between man and nature, and finally, separation between man and woman. And the key part of the curse for us, at the end of verse 16: "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." It is very possible that that one statement answers the question why there is such conflict between men and women...why? Looking first to the husband it says at the end of verse 16, "He shall rule over you," and the word "rule" means reign, it's a word of sovereignty. It means to set in an elevated position, to set in an elevated office. It is, by the way, a different Hebrew word than the one used back in chapter 1.

Look back in chapter 1 verse 28, "And God blessed them," this is before the Fall which is recorded in chapter 3, "God blessed them," that is man and woman, "And God said to them, `Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...or literally rule it...and rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" There was a mutual sovereignty there. But the word for "rule" used in 1:28 is a different kind of word. It means to subdue. It means to bring into fruition. It means to take for your own, to possess.

The word used in chapter 3 verse 16 has the idea of dominance in it. Because the woman led in the sin, because she exercised independence, she didn't consult with Adam, because she exercised individualism, God curses her. And the curse is her desire shall be to her husband. So the curse said the man as a result of the curse is going to dominate you. And as a result of the curse you are going to desire him.

What does that mean? Does it mean that she will desire him physically and sexually? I don't think that's a curse. I don't think that was a curse before the Fall. It was already true that she had a desire for him and he had desire for her physically. It is the highest form of love's fulfillment in terms of physical pleasure. It is not that she would desire him as protector, as the one who could care for her and support her and cover her. That too already existed. From the very beginning she was designed to complement him, but he was the one responsible to care for her. That already existed. She was the

weaker vessel and that is a delight to the woman to have such care and protection before the Fall.

So it has to be something other than a physical desire, it has to be something...a sexual desire, it has to be something other than a desire to be cared for, protected. It is also true that the curse could not be physical or emotional desire because not all women desire that, but all are cursed. All women are cursed. But not all women desire their husbands physically. Not all women desire the emotional love and protection and care of their husbands. This has to be something...something that touches all women, just as it is something that touches all men.

First, the woman was cursed with pain in childbearing. Right at the very life-giving point, the very...really the very high point of womanhood, to bring life into the world, she is cursed. But additionally she is cursed with this desire for her husband. What is it? What does it mean? Well the only other time that word "desire" is used, it is used over in chapter 4 and we learn something when we find how a specific word is used in a given context, it's the only other time it's used in the whole book of Genesis. In fact, the only time in the whole Pentateuch, the first five books. And you'll notice in chapter 4 how it's used in verse 7. The middle of the verse, "Sin is crouching at the door and its desire," exactly the same word, "is for you, but you must master it." The construction here in the Hebrew is exactly parallel, it is an exact parallel construction using the very same word.

What's he talking about? Talking about Cain. You remember Cain. Cain offered a sacrifice that God did not accept because it was not what God had asked. And then out of anger, you remember, he killed his brother. And it says here, "The word comes to Cain, the Lord says to Cain, 'Sin is crouching at the door, Cain, and its desire is for you but you must rule over it.'" Now what did sin want to do to Cain? It wanted to crush him. It wanted to dominate him. It wanted to take over his mind and his action. Sin wanted to rule him. Sin wanted to force him to do certain things. Sin wanted to control him. And that, I think, that is the parallel to what you have in verse 16. When it says "your desire shall be for your husband," it is the same construction, the same term as the desire that sin has to control you. Part of the curse is the woman no longer willingly, eagerly welcomes submission, but there is something in her that wants to control the man. She wants to usurp authority over her husband. That's precisely what Eve did originally, right? She should have gone to her husband, sought his wisdom when tempted, Satan knew that, Satan isolated her, Satan deceived her, she acted independently out from under the loving submission that should have been a part of her commitment to her husband and led the whole human race into sin. As she had done in the original sin when listening to Satan and never consulting Adam, she exercised authority over the man, took things into her own hands and that was in essence the curse. And since that time the sin of a woman, the innate depravity in women seeks to control.

Man then is left with a curse as well. He seeks to dominate. Why is there always a Woman's Liberation movement? And if not a movement, it's still there in the heart of women. And why is there male chauvinism and has been and always will be? Because that's how the depravity of the human

heart reveals itself in women seeking to rule and men desiring to suppress. And therein is one very possible explanation for the intensity and the ubiquitous character, that means all the time everywhere, of conflict in marriage. Woman by the Fall, in her fallenness is not willing to submit but desires to control, to exert her individualism. Man by the Fall wants to stay king of the mountain and his rule can be oppressive and insensitive. Thus the battle of the sexes began with the Fall in Genesis chapter 3. And children who come into the family just enter into the ring during the boxing match. Not a good place for children to be.

So there is male chauvinism in the world. And you can find it in cultures throughout human history. There is women's liberation in the world, and the same thing, you can find it throughout history as each one expresses the effect of the curse. Everyone selfishly fighting for his or her own turf.

And the question then comes...how can a marriage survive this kind of conflict? How can a marriage work and how can children find any peace in this kind of environment? And even the more important question...how can it be ended? How can it be ended? We've already answered that question--by two people who have come to know Christ, whose lives have been transformed, who are characterized by being Spirit-filled, joyful, thankful and submissive to one another. And that is a spiritual transformation.

In other eras, in other cultures marriages have done better than in our contemporary world. Not too many years ago, 25 years ago or so, people stayed together. That was the standard way of conduct. That's what society expected out of people and that's what happened. That does not mean that there was any less conflict. Because of fallenness, there will be conflict.

You have to go back to the spiritual dimension to end it. And that's what's so wonderful about this passage that we're looking at, and you can go back to Ephesians now. That the solution to the conflict in marriage is spiritual. And it starts with letting the Holy Spirit control your life, letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, obeying the Spirit of God as He reveals His will through the Word of God. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can reverse the curse in a home. Where you have a Spirit-filled person in the home, you have hope. Ever try to pick a fight with a Spirit-controlled person? Ever try to pick a fight with a totally joyful person that just has rising joy in their heart? Ever try to pick a fight with somebody who is thankful for everything, even the conflict? Ever try to pick a fight with somebody who is totally submissive? Very difficult. Where that exists, there's hope and it's a spiritual issue. Conflict goes where the Holy Spirit dominates.

Now as we look at the text before us, we've already kind of talked about this foundation. And Paul in verse 22 is going to launch into the specific conduct of a wife, a husband, children and parents. And we're going to look at that in detail in the next few weeks.

But before we do that, it wouldn't be fair and it wouldn't do justice to the apostle Paul if we didn't at least for a few moments consider the kind of world that he was writing to because certainly the argument comes up...Well, you know, this stuff is ancient history, this stuff is way back, it really doesn't comprehend the kind of world that we lived in, that we live in, they lived in a different time with different perspectives. And I think you need to understand what was going on, so I want to give you a little bit of history on it. I know that I may indulge myself on this from time to time, I happen to love history. When I went to college I decided that I couldn't...I couldn't make up my mind about what I wanted to minor in, I wanted to major in religious studies and so forth, and I did that. But I couldn't decide what I wanted to minor in, so I doubled minored in history and Greek. And I've always had a fascination for history, and I think through the years if I'm ever very interesting to listen to, it's probably because I have gone back into history and reconstructed some of the backgrounds that make the Bible live. And that's very, very important so that the Bible speaks for itself. And it was written in a time and in a context which demands our comprehension. So let's set a little of the scene to which the apostle Paul was writing, and you'll see some amazing parallels.

Let's talk about the Jews, first of all. Obviously there were Jews in the church in Ephesus and this was a circular letter and got around to all the churches, and eventually not only all the churches in Asia Minor, but all the churches everywhere and still getting around to all the churches everywhere. But there were many Jews in the early church and they too needed to understand the biblical view of marriage.

The Jews themselves had a low view of women. It did not come from the Bible, but then a lot of their religion by the time of Paul and Jesus did not come from the Bible. They had developed their own apostate religion. And part of it was a very low view of women. In fact, there are Jewish prayers used by Jewish men every morning of their lives. And in one of these prayers there was one line that illustrates their attitude. This is what it was, "God, I thank You that You have not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman."

Now they perceived a woman as lower on the human level than a man. A woman was an object, not a person. A woman had no legal rights. She was in the absolute power of her husband to do with her whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. In New Testament times then, among the Jews, divorce had become tragically easy and tragically common. And they supported it with a passage from the Old Testament, you know, wanting to be fastidious about their devotion to the Mosaic Law, they quoted from Deuteronomy chapter 24 and verse 1, "When a man takes a wife and marries her and it happens that...and I'll give you what the old translation is...she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her...NAS translates it indecency...some uncleanness and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house..." Stop right there. Now you'll notice that that's really an appotisis(?), or merely an introductory statement to something else, but they took it as if it was a command, basically, or certainly an allowance. And they simply said if you find...if your wife loses favor in your eyes because you find some uncleanness in

her, then you can write her a divorce and send her out of the house.

There's a lot more to that passage than that. It was not intended to permit that, it was intended to forbid the fact that if that happens and she remarries, she can never come back and marry you. That was really the issue. But they didn't get that far, they just said...There it is, if you find some indecency, some uncleanness, ship her out, give her a bill of divorce.

Now the question became...what is the uncleanness, what is the indecency? Strict rabbis, most familiarly represented by a rabbi named Shimmei(?), strict rabbis said it refers to adultery, and that's all it refers to. If she commits adultery, you can divorce her. But liberal rabbis said it refers to absolutely anything and that its vagueness is intended by God to allow you to fill in the blank. This is represented by a famous rabbi named Hillel. So throughout sort of rabbinic history, even till today, Jews argue over the view of Shimmei and Hillel.

Hillel said that a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner. It meant that she could divorce...he could divorce his wife, get this, if she spilled his dinner because, of course, a spilled dinner is a spoiled dinner. He could divorce her if she put too much salt on it. He could divorce her if she walked in public with her head uncovered. He could divorce her if she talked with men in the streets. I like this one, he could divorce her if she spoke disparagingly of her mother-in-law. And this is really good, he could divorce her if she ever argued with him.

Rabbi Achaba(?) even went further. He interpreted the phrase to mean that a husband could divorce his wife if she became unclean in his eyes because he found somebody prettier.

Now take a guess which was the most popular view among men. Shimmai had very few followers. Hillel had many. So divorce became rampant in the time of Jesus. Women were discarded all over the place. And they were victims of such discarding, left with nothing. All a man had to do at the time of Jesus, at the time of Paul, was simply to hand her a bill of divorce. And all it took to get one of those was to have a rabbi write it in the presence of two witnesses and it was done, that was it. You go to the rabbi, he writes it, there might be a little cash involved, two witnesses were there, it's done. The only alimony or support that was required was the return of the dowry and it was a done deal.

The Jews were fastidious, by the way, about following the technical side, making sure you get to a rabbi and get the documentation, but their hearts were full of cruelty and wickedness.

In Matthew 5:31 Jesus refers to this common custom. "It was said, `Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal.'" That's the way you operate, you want to divorce your wife, just make sure you do the paperwork. That's all. Just do the paperwork. And I think, just in fairness, to Jewish history, in different eras of Jewish history there were different views. But at the time of Jesus, this was the prevailing view. So divorce was the solution to any conflict, short term or long term.

And consequently the whole institution of marriage was threatened. And by the way, prostitution was rampant in Jesus time even among the Jews.

Now let's look at the Greeks. The Greeks had a very similar approach to this. They didn't have to worry about any Old Testament technicalities. They didn't have to worry about finding a verse to misinterpret, to justify what they did. They just lived in blatant disregard for any marital fidelity. Prostitution was an absolutely essential part of Greek life. Their religions were just loaded with prostitutes and it was believed, as we saw last time, not only did you commune with the gods by drunkenness, but you communed with the gods by having sexual relationships with a priestess-slash-prostitute. Demosthenes, not less than that famous orator, said, "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure, we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation, and we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and having a faithful caretaker for our household affairs." You have the babies and you pay the bills, and that was it.

The Greek man found his pleasure and even his friendship outside his marriage. His wife was a housekeeper and a baby maker. His pleasure, outside his marriage sexually. His friends, outside his marriage. Home and family life were almost extinct and fidelity was non-existent. There was no legal procedure for divorce. You just put them out.

So when Paul lays down the principles that he's laying down here, he is really running head on into the culture. This is why Paul writing to the early churches emphasizes the sin of fornication so strongly. As you read the Pauline letters, the sin of fornication comes up again and again. He talks about porneia or the verb form porneuo, to engage in sexual sin. References to prostitution, harlotry, sexual perversions of all kind because the world was dominated by those things, the Gentile world. It's not hard to remember that when you read his epistles how common that kind of stuff was. It's just a part of life. The word porneuo or porneia, the root means to prostitute. Porne is a woman for sale. Pornos is a man who lies with a prostitute or a male prostitute, a gigolo, or a homosexual. It was just everywhere and porneia is a common word in Pauline vocabulary.

According to citizenship law of 451 B.C., for example, how we're going four and a half centuries before Christ, inhabitants of Athens, for example didn't have any citizenship rights if their parents were not both Athenians. For many this meant material disadvantages so that non-Athenian women had no hope of getting married. If you weren't an Athenian woman, you didn't get married because you couldn't produce children who would be citizens and no man wanted to have children who couldn't be citizens of Athens so non-Athenian women became prostitutes. In fact, they were a professional class called Heteri which in Greek means "of a different kind."

So the ancient world, for example in Athens was just loaded with prostitutes. Married women were uneducated. They were regarded as eukoraima(??), chattel, used for keeping the house and having

children. Slavery which was rampant in that Greek world allowed men to take slave girls basically for no other purposes than sexual fulfillment, mistresses. Wide-spread prostitution, harlotry, sexual sin of all kinds was all over the place in Greek culture. They encouraged the Athenian women to fulfill their sexual needs with slaves and indulge in lesbian love. By the way, also spreading all over the ancient Greek world, long before Paul and still there during Paul's time, was pedophilia, men having sex with young children. Prostitution existed in the form of worship in the fertility cults. That was Athens.

Move to Rome for a moment. The degeneracy in Rome, if anything, was worse. William Barclay who has done a lot of background history writes, "For the first 500 years of Rome there had not been one single case of divorce on record. The first recorded divorce was that of Spurious Canelius Ruga(?) 234 B.C. But at the time of Paul, Roman family life was wrecked." Athens was way ahead of the game, 451. It was another couple hundred years before Rome indulged. By Paul's time Seneca says, "Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." The Romans did not commonly date their years by numbers, they dated their years by two things...men dated their years by the name of the Roman consuls who ruled and the women by the number of husbands.

Jerome tells of one woman who married, the records we have found on this, who married her twenty-third husband and she was his twenty-first wife. That's kind of how it was.

Emperor Augustus demanded that one woman should divorce his wife...or one man should divorce his wife, this is Emperor Augustus, while she was pregnant so he could have her.

Jerome Carcopeno(?) has written a little book called Daily Life in Ancient Rome and in the book he says there was rampant feminism in early Rome that led to continual demoralization. Some women, he writes, avoided having children for fear of losing their good looks. Sounds familiar. Some took pride in being behind their husbands in nothing and even vied with them in tests of strength. So you had women involved in building up their physical strength so that they could compete with their husbands. Some women carried on lives apart from their husbands and never blushed to charge into a male world to compete. By the end of the second century, Carcopeno writes, many Roman marriages were childless. He writes, "If the Roman women showed reluctance to perform their maternal functions, they devoted themselves on the other hand with a zeal that smacked of defiance to all sorts of pursuits which in the days of the republic men had jealously reserved for themselves."

Women didn't want to be domesticated. They didn't want to be in the home. Again this is the curse working itself out. They wanted to dominate. They wanted to be defiant. And they started charging in to areas where only men up to that time had been allowed to go. They quit their embroidery, he writes, their reading, their songs, their playing of instruments and they put their enthusiasm into an attempt to rival men if not to outclass them in every sphere. Does that sound familiar? Some plunged passionately into the study of legal suits, or current politics, eager for news of the entire world, greedy for the gossip of the town and the intrigues of the court, well informed about the latest happenings in

Thrace or in China, weighing the gravity of the dangers, threatening the king of Armenia or of Parthea with noisy effrontery. They expound their theories and their plans to generals clad in field uniform while their husbands silently look on.

Juvenal, another writer, criticized the women, listen to this, "Who joined in men's hunts, with spear in hand and breasts exposed, they took to pig sticking, especially those who engaged in fencing and some...would you even believe?...in female wrestling." I don't know if they did it in the mud or not, but they did it. He writes, "What modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet and delights in feats of strength? These woman took to gluttony and they took to drunkenness."

"Before long," writes Carcopeno, "women began to betray the pledge which they should have made to their husbands and which many of them in marrying had had the cynicism to refuse to make. 'To live your own life' became the formula which women had already brought into fashion by the second century B.C. 'We agreed long ago...says one lady...that you were to go your way and I mine. You may confound sea and sky with your

bellowing...she said to her husband...but I am a human being after all."

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? Equal rights, equal everything. Unhappy marriages were innumerable. Divorce was epidemic. Juvenal again writes, this is an ancient Roman writer, "Thus does she lord it over her husband but before long she vacates her kingdom, she flits from one home to another wearing out her bridal veil."

Marriage literally became a form of prolonged prostitution. Divorces were so common from Roman jurists that a series of them not infrequently led to the lady returning after many intermediate stages to her original bridal bed...he writes.

Well, you get the picture. It is against this kind of background which is basically because of the fallenness of the human race, it is against this kind of background so similar to ours today, a background of infidelity, a background of divorce, a background of incest, homosexuality, adultery, prostitution, pedophilia, all of that stuff, it is against that background that Paul writes. He is not here saying what everybody believed. He's not reciting the common view. He is calling men and women to a kind of life that was the absolute opposite of what they were involved in.

It reminds me of when I went to Northridge, Cal State Northridge to speak in a philosophy class. And the professor was a former rabbi with a Ph.D. in philosophy. He asked me to speak to the class on biblical...Christian biblical sex ethics...knowing that that's a great way to get your head chopped off in a secular university. It was a very challenging opportunity. After having laid out what the Bible says, I said, "Of course, none of you will agree with this because you don't have the internal commitment by virtue of knowing God, having a transformed heart, and loving Christ to be interested in maintaining

these standards."

But just as they are counter cultural today, they were counter cultural in Paul's time. It's important to realize that what we've got going on today is a whole bunch of individuals demanding to do whatever they want living out the Fall, listen carefully, without any cultural restraint, in some cultures, even in ours years back, there were some cultural restraints, no more. So now you're seeing the reality. Marriage is just a fight for rights but not by God's definition. God has a completely different plan and that plan unfolds here. And just to give you the basic principle of that plan, all I need to say is it is an authority and submission plan. Somebody is responsible to lead, the other to follow. It has nothing to do with inferiority at all. It only has to do with harmony.

The woman is not to seek to usurp the authority and dominate the husband. And the husband is not to unkindly and insensitively rule over her. Whenever this is allowed it creates massive chaos, as we are living to attest in our own day.

When the divine pattern is followed, the whole relationship is right. There's one beautiful picture of this that I...I want to take a few moments to show you and then we'll close. Turn to that most favorite book that is so often read and little preached, Song of Solomon. And some time early in their Christian experience young people always wander through this book and wonder...how in the world this girl ever believed all this flowery talk?

Song of Solomon is an incredible and marvelous book, a beautiful picture of a right relationship between a man and a woman. And there is authority and submission here but you don't feel it because it's lost in the beauty of love and it's so natural. For example, chapter 2, notice the love of this man for this woman, like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men...she's speaking for him--of him now. "In his shade I took great delight and sat down." Now that's the kind of authority we're talking about. He's like an apple tree among the trees of the forest. What's the difference between an apple tree and a pine tree? I'll tell you, fruit. He provides. So is my beloved among the young men. I mean, he has so much more to offer. And she looks at him for all that he brings to her. "In his shade I took great delight and sat down and his fruit was sweet to my taste." That is what delights the heart of a woman, nothing oppressive about that, that's just productive, that's just providing. And I'll tell you, he's lavish, "He brought me to his banquet hall and his banner over me is love." I mean, he just pours it on, he just pours it on. "Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples because I am love sick."

I mean, she is so in love with this guy. "His left hand let it be under my head, his right hand embrace me." I want him to hold me. She's talking about physically. I want him to put his arms around me. Here is a woman who is so...so fulfilled to come under his protection, his strength, his care and his love because of what he provides for her. And then she calls to the daughters of Jerusalem, you know, sort of the bridesmaids. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the

hinds of the field that you will not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases." Now the husband is responding, or the husband to be, the one who loves her. "Listen, my beloved, behold he is coming, climbing on the mountains, leaping on the hills." The guy's athletic, can't be it. "My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. Behold, he's standing behind our wall, he's looking through the windows, he's peering through the lattice." Now you know, this woman is really in love because every single move the guy makes enralls her.

"And my beloved responded to me and said, `Arise, my darling, my beautiful one and come along.'" And I know what you're saying...Boy, they haven't been married very long. "Behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have already appeared in the land. The time is arrived for pruning the vines. And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its figs, the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along. O my dove, the clefts of the rocks, in the secret place of the steep pathway, let me see your form, let me hear your voice for your voice is sweet and your form is lovely."

See, this bride just can't say enough about this...you don't hear any of this, "Boy, you know, I want to control this relationship, I've got to get this guy in line." You don't hear any of that.

Verse 16 really sums it up. "My beloved is mine and I am his." That's the issue. It's a mutual thing. But his part is to care for me and to provide for me and to embrace me and protect me and to hold me.

Chapter 4 verse 16, "Awake, O north wind, and come wind of the south, make my garden breathe out fragrance, let its spices be wafted abroad, may my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits." You know what she wishes for him? She wishes the best. She's glad to submit. He belongs to her and what she possesses is absolutely thrilling to her. She wishes only the best. This is a model of relationships.

Chapter 7 verse 10, just picking some highlights. Again, "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me." In this case this desire is a right desire. His desire is for her. He wants her. He longs for her.

Go back to chapter 5 verse 10, "My beloved is dazzling," I like that translation, "and ruddy." Outstand...this is the handsomest guy among ten thousand, "His head is like gold, pure gold, his locks are like clusters of dates and black as a raven." I mean, he's just bronze, you know, with black hair. "His eyes are like doves; gentle, soft. Doves beside streams of water bathed in milk." She's getting a little carried away here. And then "reposed in their setting." I mean, it's a dove, it's not just a dove, it's a dove beside a stream, it's a dove bathed in milk, it's a dove reposed. "His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet scented herbs, his lips are lilies dripping with liquid myrrh." Try it, guys, who knows what might happen. "His hands are rods of gold set with beryl, his abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold, his appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars." Lebanon was high and snowcapped and tall. "His

mouth is full of sweetness, he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved...I like this...and this is my...what?...my friend."

There is no conflict here. But there's no question about authority and submission. I suppose they could have problems. Go back to chapter 5 to verse 2. "I was asleep but my heart was awake. A voice, my beloved was knocking. `Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night," which is another way to say...Let me in, it's wet out here. "I have taken off my clothes, how can I put them on again?" I've washed my feet, I've had my shower, I don't want to get dirty again.

"My beloved extended his hand through the opening and my feelings were aroused for him. I arose to open to my beloved and my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved."

You know what the implication is? For some reason she shut him out, what's he doing out there? Getting wet after he's already cleaned up. They must have had an argument, right? And she said, as women will say sometimes when all the preparations have been made for a conjugal time, something bothered her and all of a sudden he's outside in the rain. But the conflict can't last. "I opened to my beloved but my beloved had turned away and gone."

Too late...too late. "My heart went out to him as he spoke, I searched for him. I didn't find him. I called him, he didn't answer me." That's the way to resolve conflict when the heart grieves over whatever caused it. She apparently got everybody involved. "The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, struck me and wounded me. The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved as to what will you tell him? For I am lovesick."

She is so lovesick that she actually goes to find him. Chapter 6, "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you?" She wants to resolve this as quickly as possible. She says, "My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of balsam to pasture his flock in the gardens and gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine, he who pastures his flock among the lilies." I know where he had to go.

Verse 4 follows it up. And finally in verse 7...chapter 7 rather, we find them making love together.

I guess the reason I wanted to take you through that little scenario is to point up that there are going to be times when there is a moment of conflict, but when the heart is pure it gets resolved so fast...so fast. And she goes to him and she finds him.

Chapter 6 verse 4, "You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awesome as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me for they have confused me. Your hair is like a flock of goats, you've descended from...that have descended from Gilead." You can see that, goats coming down the mountain, white against the dark background. "Your teeth," or I should say...yes, "Your teeth..." black goats, rather, black against the snow coming down from Mount Gilead, reverse that imagery. "Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, white which have come up from their washing, glistening white. Your temples are like a slice of pome..." I mean, she's laying it on, she finds him and she tells him all this. And in chapter 7 they're found making love.

That's the kind of spirit, the kind of attitude...Song of Solomon is not an allegory, it's just a picture of marital love. In fact, a very important one. And you see in this marvelous example of resolution in conflict and a beautiful picture of how authority and submission works together where two people love each other with such an amazing devotion.

Well, we don't have any more time. It's important to understand the simple principle in marriage that the spiritual foundation determines everything. Secondly, there is an authority/submission relationship but it is not burdensome, it is not difficult, it is not abusive.

Finally, it is best illustrated, and I'll close with this, 1 Corinthians chapter 11, by the relationship between Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Father. First Corinthians 11:3, "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of a woman and God is the head of Christ." There's no inequality between God and Christ, they're equal. There's no inequality between the man and the woman. One is in authority and one is in submission. And when it is carried out properly, it is magnificently beautiful. The woman pursues it, she runs for the protection, she runs for the affection, she runs under the leadership, the shade the provision of her husband. And he leads her with such tenderness and such sensitivity and such care and such gentleness and such strength and such consistently and such fidelity and such faithfulness that she just relishes his presence. There's no fear on her part. There's no abuse. And thus there's a willing, eager submission...a magnificent picture in Song of Solomon, absolutely magnificent. All she can do is complement, all he can do is complement her, they both understand their roles perfectly. When conflict comes it is easily resolved because they adore each other.

You say, "Well, how can a person love like that?" It comes from a transformed heart, doesn't it?

Father, we thank You tonight for some time to think about these important things, so foundational. We want, Lord, in our marriages that the Spirit of God would be in charge of everything. Authority, yes...submission, yes, but an eager devotion to each of those roles that is absolutely contrary to the curse where a man doesn't seek to dominate but to tenderly provide, lead, sustain, cherish...where a woman doesn't seek to rise, take charge, but lovingly, willingly longs to follow. And we know that this can only happen through Your power, only in the Spirit of God can the curse be set aside and

replaced with this magnificent picture. Father, may we know that the most important thing in our marriage is not the behavior of our partner, but our relationship to You, and if it's right we'll be what You want us to be in that marriage and that's the only way the ideal can ever be met. I pray for every person here, every partner. Lord, lead us to the place where we take complete responsibility for the quality of our marriage and bring ourselves before You to be the men and women You want us to be. And we thank You, Lord, for such clear instruction in our Savior's name. Amen.

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