

# Passages we wish we could ignore

BY Stephen Moore

A few weeks ago I was chatting to one of the staff from the school we share a building with, and they asked me how

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the selection of a new Pastor was going. I told them it was going well, but they also asked if this new Pastor had to necessarily be a man? I soon found myself apologising whilst trying to explain what the Bible says. I don't think I did too well!

Have you ever found yourself apologising for what the Bible says? Passages about:

- The exclusive claims of Jesus?
- The different roles of men and women?
- The apparent "discrimination" against homosexual activity?
- The eternal destination of those who refuse to trust in Jesus?

Over the coming Chronicles, I will be spending some time looking at those passages we wish we could ignore. I thought I'd grab the bull by the horns and begin with that passage that seems

to be read out at every wedding. However, it's also the passage that we feel embarrassed about for any non-Christians who might be attending.

## Ephesians 5

<sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit yourselves 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 Saviour.* <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.* <sup>29</sup> *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body,*

*just as Christ does the church—<sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body.<sup>31</sup> “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 is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.<sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33 NIV)*

On my very first Sunday as a Student Minister here at RPC, the Bible Reading during the morning service was this very passage. After the service I chatted to a gentleman at morning tea. He told me that he was actually down to do the Bible Reading but didn't want to do it, because he "didn't agree with what's written." Four years on from that day, I still hear comments such as "that was a different culture back then"; "Sure Paul says that, but he actually means the opposite"; and, "if we really want to know how to live, we need to read the Gospels about Jesus."

Whilst the perfection and authority of all 66 books of the Bible might be a discussion for another day, in regards to Ephesians 5, I want to say three things:

### **1. The Bible affirms the complete equality of men and women**

Christians have always been at the forefront of pushes for equality, and that is the place that we need to remain. In the

very first chapter of the Bible we see that *both* men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) with complete dignity, value and worth. Both are instructed by God to minister to the world. They are partners in ministry and priests to the world.

It is also worth noting that the equality yet distinction of male and females is in God's good creation, *prior* to the Fall (Genesis 3). Unfortunately, since this Fall, many women have been oppressed, marginalized, and abused. Men have also suffered, but have often been the cause of much of the suffering that women and children endure. Because life can often be tragic for women, and the fact that we live in a society that is *extremely confused about gender*, a biblical understanding of how men and women are designed to relate is very important. And that is why it's important we study passages such as Ephesians 5.

In further reference to the complete equality of men and women before God, the Bible continues a post-Fall affirmation that salvation is for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, background or gender (see Acts 2:17-18 and Galatians 3:28). This is why Christians affirm that men and women are partners in every area of life and ministry together. Although equal, as we read in Ephesians 5 men and women have biblically defined complementary and distinct roles, so that husbands are to lovingly lead their homes like Jesus.

## 2. The Bible prescribes some differing roles between men and women in the family.

Paul begins in verse 21 commanding Christians to submit to one another, and then he spends the next chunk of his letter explaining what that means practically. So it seems that submitting to one another means “submitting to others according to the authority and order designed by God,” as reflected in the examples that Paul gives.

*Note: The Greek word hypotasso (“submit”) literally means “arrange under.” It is used of submitting to God’s law (Romans 8:7), of everything being subjected under Christ’s feet (Ephesians 1:22), or of younger men being subject to older men (1 Peter 5:5). Any attempts to translate “submit” by “be supportive of,” “be committed to,” or “identify with” are incorrect.*

As Paul says in verse 22, wives are to submit to their own husbands. Now the word “submit” often brings many unhelpful modern connotations for marriage. For us today it can conjure up thoughts of tyranny and control. However, as Paul continues in verses 23-25 and 32, he tells us that *Christian marriage is an expression of the relationship between Christ*

*and his people.* There can be nothing abusive or unhealthy in that!

Paul’s teaching is that for a wife, submission will mean that she will allow her husband the freedom to care for her, lead her and accept responsibility for her. She will not seek power and control in the relationship, to dominate or rule over her husband. Submission means that she’ll encourage her husband to provide godly headship within the marriage. It means she’ll encourage him to exercise his God-given responsibility to love and lead her.

And what does a husband’s equal yet distinct role look like? Paul mentions two things in Ephesians 5. Firstly, a husband’s love looks like Jesus on the cross. According to verses 25-27, it is sacrificial, servant-like, and costly. Husbands are to die to themselves as they seek to nurture their wives in holiness and Christ-likeness. Secondly, a husband is to love his wife as he loves his own body. More specifically, a husband is to intentionally and responsibly care for his wife, so that she might reach her God-given potential.

All this to again is to reaffirm that the Bible views gender as *complementary*. That God,



in his wisdom made us male and female to complement and help each other. Unfortunately however, when people hear the phrase “complementary gender roles,” they often think straight to its impact on women.



### 3. Complementary gender roles have bigger implications for Men than for Women.

If you flick your eyes back over Ephesians 5:22-32, you'll notice quite an obvious imbalance of verses. Husbands are commanded in 9 verses, as opposed to wives who get 3. This is also the case in many other passages regarding complementary gender roles.

Wives are called to submit to their husbands, yet husbands are called to love as *wives as Christ loved the Church!* A husband's is to show his love for his by humbling himself and completely laying his life down. Grammatically in the original language, when Paul tells husbands to "love" their wives, that love is in a *continuous action*. "Love" here is more than family affection or sexual passion. Rather it is a deliberate attitude leading to action that concerns itself with another's well-being. A husband should love his wife with a love transcending all other human relationships (verses 31-33).

In closing, I need to affirm that regard-

less of whether a wife is respectful, husbands are still commanded to sacrificially love and lead their wives. And, regardless of whether a husband is sacrificially loving, wives are com-

manded to submit to their husbands. And I am not saying this is easy! We are imperfect people, in an imperfect world, and we will all continue to make mistakes. I am by no means a perfectly loving and sacrificial husband, just ask Jay! However, if we believe that Our Creator God knows what is best for us, and if we want to obey His commands as a response to His Grace, we will seek to do what he says.

### *Why am I bringing up these curly issues?*

In our search for a new Pastor, we spent a great deal of time looking at what the Bible says is required of a Pastor. One of the big things that came up is the command for Pastors to teach the "*whole counsel of God*." In other words, Pastors, and us by implication, are not to ignore parts of the Bible, but to read the Bible in its *entirety*. My prayer is that we will all continue to be shaped by God's Word, as we study it, and are humbled by it. ☞