

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 3 March 2019. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

God's Plan for the Church

Ephesians 5:21-33

In our last message from **Ephesians chapter 5**, we learned about some of the attitudes and behaviours that a Christian should have. First of all, we saw that every Christian is commanded to be *“filled with,”* or controlled by, the Holy Spirit. Being controlled by the Spirit of God is the key to sanctified Christian living. We also looked at some of the *evidences* of being filled with the Spirit. First of all, Paul said that Spirit-filled Christians will *abstain from alcohol*. Spirit-filled Christians desire to *sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs*. Spirit-filled Christians also live a lifestyle of *thankfulness* to God. All these things are fruits, or evidences, that Christians are being controlled by the Spirit of God.

This morning, we will learn another important characteristic of the Spirit-filled believer. That characteristic is **submission**. Particularly, we will see how submission applies within the **husband / wife relationship**. Yet, we will also see how submission applies within *another* relationship—and that is **the relationship of Christ to His church**. In this last half of **Ephesians 5**, Paul speaks of marriage and the church side-by side; and he compares the one to the other.

So, which of these two institutions will I focus on this morning—marriage, or the church? I certainly *could* speak of marriage first, since marriage is the first human institution that God ordained. However, I believe that the Lord would have me preach on the church this morning, and marriage next week. Now, there is a good reason why I've chosen to preach about the church first. You see, we live in a society in which the biblical concept of marriage is under serious assault. Because of the ungodly influences that bombard us every day, even many Christians have very unbiblical ideas about God's purpose and plan for marriage. So, in order to lay the groundwork for *husband-wife* relationship, I will first preach on the relationship of Christ and His church. When you rightly understand the relationship of Christ to His church, you will have a good understanding of the husband / wife relationship. Why? Because the husband-wife relationship is a *picture* of the relationship between Christ and His church. God designed it that way! The home and the church are spiritual mirrors of each other; and God has a plan for them both.

The title of this message is ***God's Plan for the Church***.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33.

This morning, we will focus on three important aspects of the relationship between Christ and His church.

I. The church's role in the relationship

In these verses, the Apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, compares the relationship between Christ and His church to the relationship between a husband and his wife. Just as Christ is the Head of the church, so the husband is the head of his wife. Now, before we go any farther, **we need to know exactly what the “church” is**. Let's read **verse 30** again, and see how Paul describes it. (**Read verse 30 again.**) Please notice carefully what Paul says here. Paul says, *“For we are members of His body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”* Does that word *“members”* sound familiar? It should! As we've studied through **Ephesians**, we've

come across several places where Paul compares the church to a “body”; and whenever he uses this analogy, he uses the word “*members*” to describe individual church members. Just as flesh and bones have important functions in the human body, so church members have important functions in the church, which is called “*Christ’s body*.”

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

In **verse 12**, Paul starts off by saying that just as a human body is one body, yet has many individual members, so it is with Christ’s body, the church. Then, he explains how one becomes a *member* of Christ’s body in the first place. It is by *baptism*. He says, “***For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.***”

Now, does baptism *save* us? Absolutely not! You could be plunged under the water a thousand times, and it would not wash your sin away. There is only one way to have your sins forgiven—and that is to repent (turn your heart, mind, and will from sin to Christ), and trust in the sacrifice that Christ made for you on the cross. Jesus said, “***Repent ye, and believe the gospel.***” Paul told the Philippian jailor, “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.***” **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, “***For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourself: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.***” **Romans 3:28** says, “***Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.***” **Romans 4:5** says, “***But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.***” No work or ritual (including baptism) can earn you salvation. It is only by repentance and faith in Christ that we can be saved.

So, if salvation be received by faith in Christ alone, and not through baptism, then what good *is* baptism? It is an outward declaration to others that you have *already* placed your faith in Christ’s saving death, burial, and resurrection. Going under the water is a picture of Christ’s death and burial; and coming up out of the water is a picture of Christ’s resurrection. Baptism also pictures the fact that we have become dead to sin, and alive to God through Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 6:1-5.

Baptism is an important step for a new Christian to take, because it is a public identification with Christ. However, there is another reason why baptism is important. Let’s look again at **1 Corinthians 12:13**. (**Read 1 Corinthians 12:13.**) Did you catch what Paul said? He said that baptism brings a Christian “*into*” the “*body*.” And what is the body? It is the local church! Look again at **verse 27**. (**Read verse 27.**) Remember, Paul is addressing a single church—the church of Corinth. And what does he say to them? He says, “***Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.***” Paul is saying that the church of Corinth was, in their locale, “*the body of Christ*.” Likewise, the church of Ephesus was, in their locale, “*the body of Christ*.” To this day, every true church is “*the body of Christ*” in its own locale; and Christ is its Head. The way to become a member of the body is, first of all, to have a genuine testimony of salvation through faith in Christ; and then, to be baptised in obedience to Christ’s command. By the way, after you become a member, you are then able to take the Lord’s Supper. That is what Paul is talking about when he says that we have all been “***made to drink into one Spirit.***” He’s talking about drinking the cup of the Lord in the Lord’s Supper.

Now, many Christians have wrong notions about the word “church.” Oftentimes, these false ideas have been carried over from the false religions to which they once belonged. For

example, some Christians still think of the church as a *building*, instead of as a living assembly of saved and baptised believers. Some Christians still think of a “church” as a large denomination, with a hierarchical structure of government, and a bishop or president at the top. Still other Christians have the idea that a church is a sort of “mystical, universal body,” composed of all believers everywhere. However, none of these ideas square with Scripture!

You see, it is important to know what the word “church” means. The word “church” simply means “assembly.” The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which literally means “called out assembly.” Now, think about that. Can you have an “invisible, universal” assembly that is scattered all over the world? No, you can’t. An “assembly” is, by its very nature, local and visible. In order to assemble together with others, you must all be *in one location*. When the Apostles spoke of Christ’s “church,” they were not talking about a huge international organisation: they were talking about a *local* assembly. When Paul wrote to the churches in the province of Galatia, he did not call them “the *church* of Galatia” (as though it were some kind of “regional church”): he called them the “***churches of Galatia***.” Every assembly of Christ is one complete body; and it is not under the authority or control of any other church or religious institution. There is no Baptist denominational headquarters, or episcopal hierarchy, that tells Redemption Baptist Church what to do. As we make our decisions, we look to Christ alone for direction. Jesus Christ is the one and only Head of Redemption Baptist Church.

The church model that we see in **1 Corinthians 12** is that of a local assembly, under the sole direction of Jesus Christ. In **verse 28**, Paul says to the church of Corinth, “***Ye are the body of Christ***.” He did not say that their church was *part of* some larger “body of Christ”: he said that their church *was* “the body of Christ.” Let that truth sink in, brethren! If the little church of Corinth *was the entire* body of Christ in its own locale, then there is no such thing as a “catholic” church. The word “catholic” means “universal”; and Christ’s church is *not* universal. It is local. Christ’s church is not an international organisation: nor is it a universal, mystical entity made up of all Christians everywhere. Rather, it is a local assembly, in which every saved member has important, God-given tasks. That is why it is so important for every new Christian to receive scriptural baptism, and become a church member. Being an active, serving member of a biblical church should be *extremely* important to every Christian. *This* assembly of baptised believers, with its membership role of 14 people, is extremely precious to Christ. Christian, have *you* become part of the body of Christ? Is it precious to *you*?

Now that we’ve examined *what* the church is, let’s see what the church’s *position* is in her relationship with Christ. Our position is that we are *subject to Christ*. According to the Bible, a wife is not “co-head” with her husband: rather, the *husband* is the head. Likewise, the church is not “co-head” with Christ. *Christ* is the Head; and we, His bride, are subject to Him.

I’m afraid that too many churches do not truly reverence Christ as their Head. Sadly, some churches view the pastor as the head; but this is an unscriptural and dangerous view. Folks, *I* am not the Head of this church. I am not to be worshipped. Now, am I to be held in high esteem? Yes. Am I to be obeyed? Yes—as long as I hold true to the teachings of God’s Word, and maintain godly character. **Hebrews 13:17** clearly says, “***Obey them that have the rule over you*** (in other words, your pastors), ***and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account***.” However, the Bible also clearly says that a pastor must be “***blameless***.” In other words, a pastor must not have any grievous sin in his life which would bring reproach upon the name of Christ. Paul said in **1 Timothy 5:19** that a pastor who *is* accused of a grievous sin should be held to the same standard that every other

member is held. (Namely, there must be two or three witnesses to establish the accusation.) A pastor *can* fail morally or doctrinally; and should he fail, he should be removed from the position of pastor. *Christ*, on the other hand, never fails. A church that looks to Christ as her Head will be sound in the faith, and able to withstand the assaults of the devil.

Many churches view the **deacon board**, or a group of trustees, as their head. However, this, too, is unscriptural and dangerous. A “board-run” church is confused, disorderly, and prone to petty and fleshly divisions. Worse yet, some churches view the **membership itself** as the head. They may profess *with their lips* that Christ is the Head of their church; but the reality is that in their *hearts*, they want to follow their own worldly desires. “After all,” they say, “we believe in democracy, right?” Actually...no, we don’t. The church is *not* a democracy. Yes, we do elect officers, and vote on policies, and vote on how to use the Lord’s money; however, as we make every decision, we carefully seek *God’s Word*, to make sure that our decisions are in accordance with Christ’s commands, and not our own desires. A church that does what *she* wants to do is a church that is in rebellion against her Head; and she will quickly turn away from the truth, and become an apostate church, which is no true church at all.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

Is this church holding Christ as the Head? Are we truly looking to His Word for guidance? If we say, “Well, of course, this is what the Bible says, *but...*”, we are in serious trouble! Christ is not the “co-head.” He is the Head! We *must* submit ourselves to Christ and His Word!

Now, let’s return to the marriage analogy. A marriage functions well only when the husband and wife understand (and follow) their biblical roles in the marriage. When they understand their *proper roles*, they will have a proper understanding of their *duties*. So it is in the church. In these verses, we see two duties that belong to us, as a church.

Let’s look at our first duty. (**Read Ephesians 5:22.**) In **verse 22**, Paul commands Christian wives to submit themselves to their own husbands. That word “submit” literally means “to set under.” It means to set yourself *willingly* under the authority of someone else. In a marriage, the wife’s proper position is to be *under* her husband’s authority. Yet, the husband shouldn’t have to force his wife to submit to his authority. Instead, the wife should enter into the marriage with the resolve to submit herself to her husband willingly, and lovingly. This is what Katie did on the day we were married. As we were writing our wedding vows, we both agreed that as part of Katie’s vow, she would say these words: “God’s Word commands that we honour those in authority; and with you as my head, I will honour, love, and **obey** you.” Yes, Katie actually uttered that controversial word “obey.” And do you know what? She has kept that promise. I don’t have to try to force Katie to submit to my headship: she does so willingly because she loves me, and because she knows that doing things God’s way always brings blessing. So it is in the church’s relationship with the Lord. (**Read verses 23 and 24.**) As a church body, we should willingly and lovingly submit to our Lord. We must die to our own will, and let Him have His way.

Now, in what *practical* way do we submit to our Head? Let’s look again at **verse 26**. (**Read verse 26 again.**) According to this verse, the Lord’s role in His relationship with His church is to sanctify and cleanse her. What is *the church’s* role, then? Our role is to *submit* to this sanctification process. As individuals, and as a church body, we must allow Christ to cleanse us from sin. This is *not* an option. Sanctification from sin is the whole reason why Christ

saved us in the first place! We are not saved *by* our good works; but we *are* saved so that Christ may now *empower* us to do good works. When a professing Christian shows no desire to submit to Christ's commands, or to be cleansed from sin, we may assume that that person is not truly saved. True Christians have a God-given desire to submit to cleansing from sin.

Read John 13:1-9.

At the Last Super, Christ washed His disciples' feet; and He did so for two reasons. First of all, He was *demonstrating* that every Christian should live a life of humble service to others. However, Christ was also *illustrating* something. He was illustrating sanctification. Just as Peter allowed the Lord to cleanse his feet, so each believer must allow the Lord to cleanse his heart from sin on a daily basis. This is God's will for every believer.

But what of the *church* body? The same truth applies. Christ desires to *cleanse* His church *as a body*. This harkens back to what we read in **Ephesians 4**. Remember how Paul said that the whole church should be "growing up" into Christ? As a church, we should be growing in Christ together, and *being cleansed* together. No member of the church has the freedom to say, "I'm going to do what *I* want to do. I'm going to hang onto this sin in my life, and sit in over the shadows. I'm not hurting anyone else in the church; and no one will notice." You don't have the right to do that! First of all, others *do* sense when a church member is living in rebellion. Even if no one else know about the sin, it *will* come to light eventually. The Bible says, "***Be sure your sin will find you out.***" A grievous sin in one member brings dishonour upon the whole assembly. And remember, whose church is this? It is *Christ's* church. We cannot expect God's hand of blessing to be on this church if there be wickedness festering in the lives of its members, like a cancer. Just as a body cannot function well when there is a sick organ, so the church cannot function well when its members are entertaining sin in their hearts. That is why it is God's will to sanctify and cleanse His church continually. It is *His* honour that is besmirched when we live in sin. Are we, as a church, submitting to cleansing?

Now, what other duties does the church have? Let's read **verse 27** again. (**Read Ephesians 5:27.**) According to this verse, it is our duty, as Christ's bride, to prepare ourselves for our Marriage. Christ wants to present us to Himself on His wedding day "***without spot or wrinkle.***" Now, in order to understand this truth fully, it is helpful to understand how Jewish marriages worked in Bible times. Jewish marriages came in two stages. First, there was **betrothal**. During betrothal, the couple was legally married; but the couple did not live together in physical union. During betrothal, the husband was busy preparing a house for his bride, and arranging the wedding; and the bride was busy preparing herself for the wedding. The bridegroom would come for his bride suddenly, without warning, with an entourage of trumpets; and the bride and her maidens had to be ready, at a minute's notice, to meet him.

This is where the second stage of marriage (the "living together" stage) began. After the groom had collected his bride, he would take her to the wedding ceremony; and after the ceremony, the guests would feast and make merry—usually for seven days. In the meantime, the groom would take his bride to their chamber, and consummate the marriage physically. After the end of the wedding feast, the groom returned to the wedding guests with his bride. From that point onward, the husband and wife lived together in unbroken union.

All of this is a beautiful picture of what is coming. Right now, Redemption Baptist Church is betrothed to Christ; but we are not yet dwelling with Him in heaven. However, a blessed day

is coming! One day, Christ will suddenly appear in the clouds, with the sound of trumpets, and will gather His bride to the beautiful home He has prepared for her. We will first stand before Christ to be judged, and receive rewards for what we did for God on earth. Then, we will enjoy the marriage supper in heaven for seven years; and after the seven years, we will return with Christ to earth, to rule with Him for 1,000 years.

Read John 14:1-3.

Read Revelation 19:7-16 and 20:1-4.

On the day of the Rapture, when all New Testament age Christians are caught up to heaven in immortal, glorified bodies, the “marriage” with our Lord will take place. On that day, we will be presented to our Lord without spot or wrinkle, like a Bride in a spotless white wedding gown. On that day, we will be *completely* sanctified, without trace of sin. But until then, we must prepare ourselves. We must allow Christ to sanctify and cleanse us with His Word.

Now, there is one more duty that Christ’s bride has: and that is to *revere* Christ. Reverence is the *attitude* of that leads to godly submission. **(Read Ephesians 5:33.)** So that you may understand the importance of this word “reverence,” let me give you some other synonyms for “reverence.” “Reverence” is translated from the Greek word *phobeo*; and *phobeo* means “to be in fear or awe of; to be greatly frightened or alarmed.” This is the same word that is used in **Luke 2**, where we are told that the shepherds were “*sore afraid*” of the angel of the Lord!

Now, the idea of fearing the Lord is almost unthinkable to the modern mind. In our self-consumed society, people abhor the thought of having to “fear” or “obey” anyone, including God: and if people disdain the idea of fearing God, how much more do they disdain the idea of a wife’s “reverencing” her husband? Now, I can hear the objections that some people might make. “Pastor, are you saying that it is O.K. for a husband to be a tyrant? Are you saying that a wife should quake in fear of her husband?” No, that is not what I mean at all! Remember, husbands are commanded to *love* their wives with the self-sacrificial love that Christ had for His church. (That is *not* the attitude of a brute or a tyrant!) To be sure, a wife *should* fear to defy her husband’s authority: but *not* because she fears that her husband might harm her. (The husband *had better* not harm his wife!) Rather, she should fear the thought of defying her husband’s authority, because to do so would be to *defy God*, who *gave* her husband his authority. A woman’s reverence of her husband is really directed toward *God*.

So it should be in our relationship with our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. As a church, we should tremble at the thought of defying *His* will, because He is our Bridegroom *and* our God! Is this the attitude of *this* assembly toward our Head? Do we reverence our Lord Jesus Christ?

II. Christ’s role in the relationship

We’ve talked a lot about the church’s role in her relationship with Christ; and in doing so, we’ve learned much about Christ’s role, as well. However, I would like to point out a few more things about Christ’s role. First of all, let’s examine Christ’s identity. **(Read verse 23 again.)** In this verse, Christ is called “*the saviour of the body.*” By calling Christ “*the saviour of the body,*” Paul is giving us his first-century readers a mental picture with which they could identify. The picture is of Christ going to a slave market, finding us in bondage, and then saving us from bondage by purchasing us, and freeing us. You see, we who are

saved were once the slaves of sin; but Christ purchased us, and set us free. And not only did He set us free: He set us free so that we, as a church body, could become His bride.

Read Romans 6:14-18, 20-23.

Read Acts 20:28.

Every born-again Christian has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. A sinner is given freedom from the penalty and the power of sin at the moment he receives God's gift of salvation. However, we mustn't forget that Christ did not merely purchase *individual* Christians with His blood: He also purchased *the church* with His blood. This assembly of saved and baptised believers has, as a body, been *purchased* by the blood of Christ!

Now, what is Christ's *position* in the relationship? As we've already seen, He is our Head. He is Lord; and we must obey Him! Jesus said, "***Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?***" Yet, just as a husband has *duties* that come along with his position of headship, so *Christ* has duties, as well! Now, that is an amazing thought, isn't it? *Christ*, our Lord and Master, actually has duties and obligations toward *us*! There is something you need to understand, though: the duties that Christ has toward His church are duties that *He* has laid upon *Himself*. He owed us nothing, except to let us go to eternal damnation! It is only out of His incredible *love* for us that He has taken these duties upon Himself.

With this in mind, let's see what Christ's duties are. First of all, He took the penalty for our sin on the cross, so that He might redeem us unto Himself. But what *other* duty has He laid upon Himself? Let's look again. **(Read verses 26-27 again.)** According to this verse, Christ has laid upon Himself the duty of sanctifying and cleansing His Bride, and preparing her to meet Himself. And notice what the agent of cleansing is. **It is the Word of God!**

By the way, in the New Testament, there are two Greek words for "word." The word *logos* refers to a whole *body* of words. Simply put, *logos* refers to the whole body of Scripture (the Bible). However, the word *rema* refers to *specific* words. Well, guess what? *Rema* is the word that is used here in **Ephesians 5:26**, where Paul says that Christ cleanses His church with the "***washing of water by the word.***" What does this mean? This means that Christ's church is washed and cleansed by *specific* words of God. If we, as a church, desire to be clean and pure, then we must diligently study God's Word, so that we can find *specific* words to convict us of specific sins. When we come to church, we should not come to please ourselves, but rather to be convicted by God's words, so that we might be cleansed from sin.

Read Psalm 119:9-11.

III. The union of Christ with His church (vv. 31-32)

(Read Ephesians 5:30-32 again.) In **verse 32**, Paul uses the word "*mystery.*" Now, what is a "mystery"? If you were here when we were studying **chapter 3**, you'll remember that a mystery is "**a truth that God once kept hidden, but which He has now openly revealed to us.**" What, then, *is* this mystery? What *is* this thing which God once kept hidden? **Verse 30** answers the question. Let's read it again. **(Read verse 32 again.)** The *church* is the mystery that God once kept hidden. From the very beginning of the world, God instituted marriage to be a picture of the union between Christ and His church. Now, in Old Testament times, the

nation of Israel was the wife of Jehovah (and she *still* is). Yet, all along, God had a plan to take *another* people as His bride; and that people is the New Testament church, which is made up of Jews *and* Gentiles who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. For 4,000 years, only *God* knew about this plan to create a new body called “the church.” It was a mystery. But now, God has revealed it for all the world to see; and soon, the long-awaited union between Christ and His church will take place in the clouds of heaven!

Conclusion: Christ has bound this church in union with Himself. Are we, the members of Redemption Baptist Church, preparing ourselves for our wedding day? Are we submitting to our Head? Are we reverencing our Bridegroom with godly fear? Are we allowing Him to sanctify us through His Word?

I would also ask this question: Are you born again? If you pass out of this life without having received God’s gift of salvation, then you will *not* take part in the marriage feast. While God’s people are being seated at the banquet, you will stand outside the door knocking, and saying, “***Lord, Lord, open unto me!***” But Christ will say, “***I know not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.***” My friend, don’t be on the outside of the door on that day. Be on the *inside!* Turn from your sin, and stop clinging to your worthless self-righteousness. Trust in Christ alone to save you! **(Quote Acts 16:31.)**