

## Quality Lifetime Relationships

This past Sunday we returned to our study of the book of Ephesians, tackling a passage that offers relationship advice.

1. Warm up question. If you were writing a personal ad about yourself on an online dating sight, what's something "fetching" you would say about yourself?
2. Ephesians chapter 5 was written at a time when gender roles in spousal relationships were defined in patriarchal terms. So, for example, wives are told to be submissive to their husbands. That aspect of the passage is so disturbing, we need to figure out how to deal with it before we can even begin to consider whether there are positive lessons we can draw from the passage. To sort this out, Jeff suggested we have to get clear about what the Bible is and isn't intended to be.
  - a. Galatians 5:18 says, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law." This is a theme frequently emphasized in the New Testament. What does it mean, and how should it affect our approach to the Scriptures?
  - b. Suppose you come across a verse that seems contrary to what God's Spirit is saying inside you, and you decide to go with the Spirit rather than the verse. Is that wrong? Is it disrespectful of the Scriptures?
  - c. In John 16:12, Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all truth." Given what Jesus says here, should we feel free to depart from what a Bible verse says when it feels like the Spirit is guiding us to something new? Why or why not?
3. Based on what we've discussed above, Jeff suggested we should feel free to disregard the first-century gender stereotypes embedded in Ephesians 5, and instead look for the principles in the passage that feel timeless and enduring. So let's now read Ephesians 5:1-2, and 21-33.
4. On Sunday, we focused on two principles implicit in this passage. The first is found in verse 21 – a verse that is addressed to everyone (not just wives): "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." This is principle often referred to as "mutual submission."
  - a. What do you think it means "to be subject to one another"? Do you think this is an important relationship principle? Why or why not?
  - b. Think about one of the most beautiful relationships you've ever observed; it doesn't have to be between spouses. Did the individuals in that relationship seem to practice "mutual submission"? If so, how did that manifest?

- c. Think about a relationship that you're in right now with a spouse, friend, family member, or coworker. Think of a recent difference of opinion between the two of you (large or small). What happened? Do you feel the outcome was consistent with the concept of "mutual submission"?
- d. When you're practicing mutual submission with your spouse or someone else, how do you know when you're going too far and becoming a doormat?
- e. What are some practical ways to get better at "mutual submission"?

5. The second principle highlighted on Sunday is found in verse 25. That verse, translated into our modern language of gender equality, reads as follows, "Husbands and wives, husbands and wives, love your spouse, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it." The Greek word translated "love" here is "agape." In ancient Greek, there were different words for different kinds of love. "Agape" was the rarest word for love. It means sacrificial love. It's not a love based on emotion or impulse, but on a conscious choice to love someone even when you don't feel like it or it's contrary to your narrow self-interest. That's how God loves us; that's how Jesus loved us in his life and on the cross.

- a. What does it mean to "love your spouse as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it"? What does that kind of love look like?
- b. When in your own life have you experienced (or witnessed) agape love in action? How did it feel?
- c. I John 4:8 says, "Anyone who does not love (agape) does not know God, because God is love (agape)." What does that mean? What do you get out of that verse?
- d. Why is a willingness to sacrifice so important to sustaining quality lifetime relationships?
- e. Should there be any limits to our willingness to sacrifice for our spouse? Is it ever possible to divorce someone in a way that's consistent with agape love? If so, how or when?