

**God and Marriage**  
**Ephesians 5:21-33**  
**September 17th 2023**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

Ed Shaw is a Bible-believing Church of England pastor who finds himself attracted to members of his own sex instead of members of the opposite sex. This, he writes, *“has never gone away and I remain exclusively same-sex attracted, despite all my best efforts and prayers to change.”* (TPP, page 27). Ed realises that he belongs to a small minority of people who suffer one of the many twists that are the result of the Fall of Mankind, recorded in Genesis chapter 3. He knows that God made men to be attracted to women and women to men, but the Fall has twisted all of us in some way or another, and a small minority of people discover they are same-sex attracted.

(A more common twist, we should say here, is when a man covets a woman who is not his wife, or a woman covets a man who is not her husband: same-sex attraction is not the only way that sex has been polluted by the Fall of Mankind.) Ed Shaw knows it would be sinful to have a partner, *“homosexual practise is wrong in God’s sight—I am absolutely convinced of this, despite my own same-sex attraction.”* (page 29). And so as a follower of Jesus Christ he has decided to live a single celibate Christian life. And to help fellow believers who find themselves in a similar plight Ed has written books and started a Christian organisation called “Living Out.”

Now, brothers and sisters, I’m aware that we’re jumping in right at the deep end this morning, but the world we now live in requires us to be upfront and open about these issues; we can no longer evade, sidestep, or dodge these matters for we live, in a “crooked and depraved generation” as Paul puts it in Philippians chapter 2.

I start with Pastor Shaw because as he was growing up in the church, he struggled with the way the church treated singleness and celibacy. Churches have sometimes given the impression that every Christian must get married and that single folk are second-class citizens. And that attitude, you can well imagine, made Ed feel even more isolated and lonely. And so, in this sermon about Christian marriage, I want to begin by saying:

## **(1) Marriage is not for every believer!**

*(so let us honour the single state)*

There will be a small minority of Christians, like Ed, who will remain single out of obedience to Jesus Christ. And there will be another group of Christians, who are attracted to the members of the opposite sex, but believe that God is calling them to a single life, and that is OK. It's OK to be single! How do we know? Jesus Christ was a single man! That should be argument enough. And so was the Apostle Paul, at least during his years of ministry, *"I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another that."* (1 Corinthians 7:7). There is such a thing as the gift of singleness, says Paul - did you know that? God gives to some of his people the gift of being able to live single and being very contented in that state.

So we need to say to all our young people, as they begin to think about the future, and to all our single folk, no matter what age, "Don't automatically assume that you will get married, prayerfully consider the possibility that God may call you to a single life." And in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul gives powerful arguments, reasons for the single state:

Like, "you can serve the Lord more wholeheartedly when you are single." *"I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interest are divided."* (32-33)

I once stayed at the home of a single Christian missionary and was astounded by the amount of time and energy he had to serve the Lord. From the moment he woke to the moment he laid his head down to sleep, he was serving the Lord in this endeavour or that; in the most remarkable single-minded, focused way. Another consideration Paul gives single folk to mull over is this:

Don't think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence! In a fallen world marriage may be filled with heartache. *"Those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this."* (1 Corinthians 7:28). Paul isn't only thinking of problems in the marriage relationship, he's also thinking about the sorrows that will come into our lives through children and grandchildren. "A parent" said one wise man,

“is only ever as happy as their saddest child.” Parents carry all the burdens of their children, as if they were their own. The joys, yes, but the sorrows too!

So if you are unmarried this morning, ask the Lord if he has given you the gift of singleness. Don't rush into getting married. And as a church, let's not badger our single folk into marriage and let there be nothing about our corporate church life that isolates singles or unduly elevates the married state. Let's honour our single folk as much as we honour those who are married.

## (2) Marriage is God's Idea (so we must consult Scripture)

Marriage is not a human invention or a societal convention, it was designed by God. So if we want to know what it is all about we must consult the Scriptures. Genesis chapter 2 describes marriage most beautifully. God first created Adam but since he was on his own he makes Eve. (By the way, if God calls you to singleness make sure that you fill your life with friends—just as Jesus did, gathered 12 friends around him so “that they might be with him” (Mark 3:14). Paul did the same thing—read his letters. “It is not good for a man (or a woman) to be on their own” is a universal statement for all of mankind.)

Since Adam was on his own, God created Eve, as his helpmeet, and then declared: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.”* (2:24) Marriage is the union between one man and one woman, and part of that union is sex, “they will become one flesh.” I was watching a programme about a certain football team the other day. The cameras went into the home of one of the players— and we were introduced to his fiancé and their little baby and then they said they were planning to get married. *Live together—baby—engaged—marriage.* It's a common modern scene, I am sure, but according to Scripture, its mixed up and back to front. Here is the right order of events for a Christian...

- prayerfully determine if you have the gift of singleness or not
- If you don't have the gift of singleness but have the gift of marriage, seek a husband or a wife

- Make sure the person you choose is a true believer, so that you are not unequally yoked
- Then get engaged
- Then get married and live together
- After that you may enjoy God's good gift of sex, now that you are married,
- Then children, if God grants them

We need to say a word about sex. The only righteous place for sex is within the marriage of one man and one woman. All sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is sin in the eyes of God. The world has taken sex out of marriage, and says "it's only sex" a "recreational activity between two consenting adults." But the way God has designed sex is such that there is no such thing as "just sex." *"Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." (1 Cor 6:16)* When a man and a woman make love, a mysterious union takes place, according to Scripture. A mystical attachment is formed; there is, in point of fact, no such thing as "casual sex."

### **(3) Marriage is a Great Blessing** *(when we follow the Maker's guidelines)*

Marriage is a great blessing when we follow the Maker's instructions, his guidelines. A few months ago, one of my sons bought a new kayak. After the first couple of times we used it, we rolled it up as you do a sleeping bag and put it back in it's case. But the last time we rolled it up we spotted a pouch in the carrying bag which contained the Maker's Instructions! (We didn't know it was there!) And the instructions said, "fold the boat over, don't roll it up." My guess is that if we hadn't come across those instructions, the kayak would have been ruined in a short time by rolling it rather than folding it. God has designed it to work in his way, and when we follow his good and loving will, marriage turns out to be a very great blessing!

I would encourage every married couple to prayerfully read together the following Scriptures and review their marriages and their own behaviour in the light of them, write them down?

- Genesis 2

- 1 Corinthians 7
- Ephesians 5
- Colossians 3
- 1 Peter 3

If you are married to an unbeliever then 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3 are especially relevant.

Wives here are your guidelines, *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. [the word “submit” means recognise the divine order between men and women, remember last week?] 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

Husband here are your guidelines: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “*

And for both, *“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

You have to work out what the Lord wants from you, and as you do, your marriage will flourish and become a great source of blessing to you both. Don't point out where your partner is failing in their responsibility, rather concentrate on your own personal obedience.

How is your marriage? May I ask you that? Do you pray together, where that is possible? I am shocked and saddened by Christian couples who tell me they don't pray together! Husbands you lead in pray!

#### **(4) Marriage will be for every believer!**

*(Heaven = Capital "M" Marriage)*

Tucked away in Ephesians 5 is the noblest truth about marriage found anywhere in Scripture, *"This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."* "But, Paul, you're talking about marriage, not Jesus or the Church!"

Before God created Adam and Eve, he dreamt up a much bigger capital "M" Marriage, between his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the bridegroom, the husband, and his redeemed people, the Church, the bride. And as we gather here this morning, God is looking forward to that Marriage, and so should we:

*"Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Revelation 19:6-8)*

*"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev 21)*

God's great plan was to be with his people forever! That is capital "M" marriage!

And then, when it came around to making mankind, God designed small "m" human marriage and modelled it on Marriage, capital M. One day every true believer will experience the joy of that deep and fulfilling relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Human marriage is short and passing, but heaven's Marriage is eternal. Not every believer will experience earthly marriage, but every saint will experience the warmth of God's eternal embrace. Some earthly marriages are not as happy as they should be, some even fail, but the Marriage of heaven will be filled with never-failing joy.

One day, brothers and sisters, whatever our marital state in this world, we'll enjoy the reality of a spiritual relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and Friend, that will far outstrip the very best earthly marriage.

And that is where our hope should lie!