

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Ephesians 5:21 – 31**  
**Theme: “Love is not a feeling, it’s an act of the will”**  
**“Love like Jesus in your relationships”**

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***Introduction:***

This is a song, written and sung *a while ago now* by the Christian musician, Don Francisco. (Online Song: “Love is not (just) a feeling” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKbHFMADh8Y>)

Don Francisco introduces this song on his CD by saying:  
**I’ve run into a few people whose lives seem to have just sailed from the point at which they got married up to the golden years. I haven’t met many people like that. But I’ve met a lot of people with the attitude: “Uph, that does it!!**

**I’m not going to take this anymore!” And if you’ve ever been there or you’re there now, I’ve been there. I think that this song is for all of us....**

Don Francisco sings:

***Jesus didn’t die for you,  
Because it was fun.  
He hung there for love,  
Because it had to be done.  
And in spite of the anguish,  
His word was fulfilled.  
For love is not a feeling,  
It’s an act of your will.  
Love is not a feeling,  
It’s an act of your will...***

It’s a song primarily about the marriage relationship.... But the words of this song, and the principles of what Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus in our Bible reading can be applied to all our relationships: our relationships with our loved ones, with our parents, or our brothers or sisters, or our children, or our relatives....

“Love is not a feeling, it’s an act of the will” is today’s theme. I’ll be talking mainly about the marriage relationship, as I said, because this is what our Bible reading is on about, and what the song is on about.... But in the process I’ll be talking about all our relationships, and how God wants us to live in these relationships....

### ***Part 1: Love is not a feeling***

Well, let’s begin with the marriage relationship.... In our society, something is mighty wrong with the way that people view marriage and handle the marriage relationship. A horrific number of marriages in Australia break up and end in divorce: in fact, over one-third of all marriages in Australia end in divorce. Many, many men and women in Australia go through the trauma and the absolute ‘hell’ of divorce, and countless children have the stability of their home life taken away.

Why? Why do so many marriages fail? Well, there are many reasons.... Some end because of verbal and physical abuse, *often to the wife by a domineering husband*....

High among the reasons for marriage failure, surely, is the refusal to forgive: a lot of marriages *or unions* end because one partner refuses to forgive the other hurts that have been inflicted on him or her....

But one prominent reason, too, surely is because love is seen to be a romantic feeling, a high, a ‘buzz’ that one has when a man and a woman really click together. All too many people in our society see marriage, and sexual relationships in general, through rose coloured romantic glasses.

If a couple are ‘in love’, if they feel ‘in love’, society allows almost anything. If you are ‘in love’, sex before marriage is O.K. So is sex outside of marriage.... So is sex anyway or between anyone....

The problem of seeing love as a feeling, though, is that feelings change and even disappear. And in a marriage relationship, when the feeling of love disappears, many couples divorce *or just say “Goodbye”* and start over again with someone else, who they fall ‘in love’ with and have this feeling of being ‘in love’....

So I think that this notion that love is primarily a feeling has much to answer for, so far as many broken marriage relationships in our society are concerned.

## ***Part 2: It's an act of the will***

Love, though, is not primarily a feeling! No, rather as Don Francisco puts it: "It's an act of your will". And in this act of the will, Jesus is our example, our teacher, and our empower....

Let me explain:

1) "I don't always feel in love with my wife, Jenine". Let me say this again, because people often give me a funny look when I say this. "I don't always feel in love with my wife, Jenine". There are many times when what she says and does really irritates me, but I go on trying to love her by what I say to her and what I do for her. And she does likewise, although she has to put up with much more from me, than I do from her, that's for sure!!

Why does Jenine go on trying to love me, and why do I go on trying to love Jenine? Because we've promised to love one another in front of God and our family and our friends. Because God has given us to one another to love and be loved. And because this is what our Lord Jesus wants us to do: to spend our life in loving service of one another. Jesus asks me to love Jenine, and Jenine to love me, *as he has loved us*. What does Jesus, our Lord, command us? "*Love one another, just as I love you*" (John 15:12; 13:34).

Jesus, our Lord, is our example. He is the one who shows us in his actions (*hold up the Bible*) what love of others involves, and what love of a husband or a wife involves....

2) So what is marriage all about then? When Jesus spoke about marriage, he made it clear that marriage is the public commitment of a man to a woman, and a woman to a man, a public commitment to love and care for the other person, *for life*.

When some religious leaders came to Jesus and asked him whether God's Law allows a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes, Jesus replied:

**"Haven't you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? And God said, 'For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one'. So they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together"** (Matt. 19).

Marriage is a public commitment to love and to care for the other for the rest of one's life. Divorce is not God's will, but that doesn't mean either that it's the unpardonable sin.... *Sometimes, like in situations of abuse, divorce is only safe option....*

So in the marriage service, the man promises the woman, and the woman promises the man:

**In the presence of God, I take you to be my wife/husband;  
to have and to hold from this day forward,  
for better for worse,  
for richer for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
as long as we both shall live.**

**This is my solemn vow and promise** (*Lutheran service order*).

3) In our Bible reading which is our text for this morning, Paul speaks about this marriage relationship. Now I know that there are many, particularly women, who find it hard to deal with this passage, because it speaks about "submission" by the wife to the husband. *There are many who would cut this section out of the Bible, if they could.... And there are many who would have pastors never preach on this passage, if they know what is good for them....*

But let me quickly explain. Paul wrote this into a social situation where the man had unquestionable rights of authority over his wife:

he could do with her what he liked, and in Jewish Law she was regarded not as a person, but as thing. Paul here, then, writes into a situation where "submission" and "headship" were taken for granted, and what it meant in that society was that the man was the unquestioned "boss" of the woman.

So Paul writes into this situation, *and while he doesn't insist that the social order be radically changed*, he does insist that male-female marriage relationships be "baptised with the spirit of Christ" as one Christian writer puts it (*Caird, Paul's Letters from Prison, 88*).

He commands husbands to "love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it*" (*Eph. 5:25*). So headship, as Paul transforms it with the spirit of Christ, means "care rather than control,

responsibility rather than rule” (*Stott, The Message of Ephesians, 225*).

And he asks wives to submit to their husbands, not because they have to, but as an act of service “the Lord”. Elsewhere, Paul has stressed that male and female are equal before God: before God, he says, “there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus” (*Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11*).

So he says in effect in our passage from his letter to the church in Ephesus:

“Don’t submit to your husband as a slave to a boss, because you are equal before God. But submit to him, as a service “to the Lord”. Submit to his care, as “the church submits itself to Christ” and his care (*Eph. 5:24*).

As I said, it’s a difficult passage to talk about, given the way that our society views any sort of submission....

But let’s not forget that here Paul writes into the cultural situation of his time where wives were chattels, pieces of property, and where the Jewish man every morning gave thanks to God that God hadn’t made him “a Gentile, or a slave, or a woman” (*Stott,224*).

What Paul is attempting to do here is to encourage his readers to let the Spirit of Jesus, in them, change the way they interact in their marriage relationship, just as Jesus has changed their other relationships.

And let’s not forget that Paul only talks about “submission”, the surrendering of one’s rights, after he has said that all Christians are to submit themselves to one another (*Eph. 5:21*). That’s what being a Christian, a follower of Jesus is all about: love of one another, mutual service of one another, mutual honour of one another... (see *Vic Pfitzner, Who’s the Boss?, p.1*).

In all this, Paul puts Jesus forward as our example of how to love (*Eph. 5:2, 25*). And that’s the thought that I want each of us to take from today’s message for our relationships with our husband or wife, or loved one, or our family members or our friends.....

Jesus is not only our teacher and he it is who empowers us to love by means of his Spirit in us who are baptised and who cling to Jesus as our Saviour, but he is also our example of how to give of ourself in love for another person or for other people (*cf. Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 12:1-2*).

As Don Francisco puts in in his song:

***Jesus didn't die for you,  
Because it was fun.  
He hung there for love,  
Because it had to be done....  
Love is not a feeling,  
It's an act of your will...***

Jesus is our example of how to love, and how to give of our self for others. He gave himself willingly to help and care for all sorts of people: from the woman at the well in Samaria (*John 4*), to the widow at Nain (*Luke 7*), to the man born blind who sought his help (*Luke 19:35-43; cf. John 9*), to the many who came to him to ask him for help in their troubles and their sicknesses....

He demonstrated clearly what love involves when he got down on his knees as a servant and washed the feet of his disciples (*John 13*). And finally, he willingly gave his life for us on that cross, out of love for us all, in order to bear the punishment that we deserve from God.

### ***Conclusion:***

In all our relationships, including our marriage relationship if we have one, Jesus is our teacher, the One who wants to empower us with his Spirit to love and compassion, and the One who is our example of how to love and how to give of our self for another.

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## *Addenda:*

- 1) The Jewish prayer book (*siddur*) is thick with texts: blessings, thanksgivings, and petitions, instructions, theological claims, and historical memories. Some traditional texts bear especially outsized burdens. **In this respect, few can rival three lines that begin “Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me...” and conclude, respectively, “a goy [Gentile],” “a slave,” and “a woman.”**
- 2) **There is little doubt what ‘submission’ meant in the ancient world in which disdain for women was almost universal (cf. *Jewish morning prayer*).... ‘In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing.... She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband’s possession to do with as he willed....**

**The position was worse in the Greek world....** The whole Greek way of life made companionship between a man and a woman next to impossible. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere.... In Greece, home and family life were almost non-existent.

**In Rome in Paul’s day, the matter was still worse.... The degeneracy of Rome was tragic...** It is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere of the ancient world was adulterous.... The marriage bond was on the complete breakdown’ (*quoting Barclay, 199-203*).

**In the Roman Empire..., ‘A girl was completely under her father’s, a wife completely under her husband’s, power. She was his chattel.... Her life was one of legal incapacity which amounted to enslavement.....**

**It is against this dark background that Paul’s teaching shines with such bright light.**

**In order to understand the nature of the husband’s headship in the new society which God has inaugurated, we need to look at Jesus Christ.... It is from Christ as head that the body derives its health and grows into maturity. His headship expresses care rather than control, responsibility rather than rule....**

There is nothing demeaning about (*submission*), for **her submission is not to be unthinking obedience to his rule, but rather a grateful acceptance of his care (Stott, *Ephesians*, p. 224-226).**

- \* Paul is basing his instructions on a code of household rules in common use throughout the early Gentile mission of the church, adapted from Jewish and Stoic patterns. **All over the ancient world the paterfamilias wielded an unquestioned authority; and Paul, though the first to insist that the discrimination against slaves and women had been made obsolete by Christ (*Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11*), and that mutual subordination is the general rule of Christian ancient society, shows no disposition to tamper with the basic structure of ancient society.**

**What he does is to require that the code of subordination shall be properly baptised with the spirit of Christ.**

**The whole passage is an excellent illustration of the general ethical principle...that the Spirit-filled man must and can discern the will of God within the limitations imposed by a defective social order (*Caird, Paul's letters from Prison, p. 88*).**