

Linda Driver

Athelstone Uniting Church #147

28 August 2021

It's All About Love!

Bible reading: Ephesians – selected verses were read throughout the service, all NIV unless specified:

Ephesians 1: 3 – 14; Ephesians 2: 1 – 10; ; Ephesians 6: 5 – 7 [Msg]; Ephesians 3: 6 – 9; Ephesians 6: 10 – 19;

Ephesians 3: 20 – 21

Ephesians 5: 21 – 33

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

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.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Let's pray:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen.¹

Greetings, Athelstonians!

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Ephesians 1: 2 NIV*)

It has been 2 weeks since I have been here sharing with you. During that time, I have been studying, preparing for the Assembly Standing Committee and preparing for our next series, the Season of Creation. A full 2 weeks!

Last time I preached, I shared a story about 'Dave', my new friend. Some of you were really touched by this story and donated gluten free food and warm bedding for him. Thank you so much for your kindness. Paul has delivered these items to 'Dave' on your behalf. I want you to know that my new friend is really grateful and has passed on his thanks. He would like to come to Church and meet you one day and thank you in person. So, do look out for 'Dave' and make him welcome.

¹ Psalm 19:14

Acts of kindness and generosity like this are the kind of agape or sacrificial love that Paul speaks about in Ephesians.

Love modelled on the love that Jesus demonstrated in his life and death here among us.

You may have heard about another act of love that a sheep farmer did recently, when he was unable to get to his beloved Aunt's funeral, he paid tribute in his own unique way, through his sheep in his paddock

Take a few breaths, sit back and watch this beautiful expression of love from a nephew to an Aunt..

It's all about love..

Play video: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-26/ben-jackson-sheep-art-tribute-/100405436?fbclid=IwAR0jSGza8EouPLmFRaMqNHQI8io_31chB62TFRvOQseGMqJ0G_JPRXq2m24

It's all about love..

When Ben Jackson couldn't attend his Aunt's funeral because of a QLD border closure due to COVID, he paid tribute using what he calls 'sheep art'.

He said it was tough not being able to celebrate her life with family. "You feel a bit helpless on the farm. You want to be giving the family hugs and sharing the love," said Mr Jackson. So, he created his own virtual hug.

He went about his work on the farm, as usual, laying out some supplementary feed for his ewes. He poured the grain onto the ground then let the sheep do the rest. Using a drone, he then captured the moment as the feeding sheep were sculptured into a heart shape.

"My aunty loved coming down to the farm and poking around so I just thought a heart for her would be very appropriate," he said.

Sheep art as a sign of Love.

It's all about love..

Over the last 7 weeks I have been encouraging you to read through the letter to the Ephesians. In a nutshell, my summary of this letter is ... Love... it's all about Love!

Paul, having discovered personally the extraordinary love that God has for him was transformed. He spent his days from then on spreading the news of God's love and grace. Love for the Jews, seen then as God's chosen people. Love for all people, known then as Gentiles.

We praise God because of the wonderful things he has done in Christ. We are so blessed!

We praise God for the glorious grace he has lavished upon us

This is why we come to worship our God together, saying words of praise and adoration, singing songs that speak of how wonderful God is

It's why we respond in love, sharing the lavish blessings we have received with others during the week. This overflow of grace is just too much to contain!

It's all about love..

Paul emphasised that this love was for all – that all are equal before Christ:

All followers of Jesus, whatever their background, culture or ethnic identity, have been chosen and adopted by God into the family of God.

The 'classes' at the time: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free... all have been received in grace, all are redeemed and forgiven.

The oppressive structures of the time were being replaced by the freedom of the kingdom of Christ.

This new kingdom, or new society, needed new values, new ways of living.

Paul talked about being *in* Christ

And how being *in* Christ as a community and in our relationships with one another can influence how we treat each other.

This is the cross-shaped life that I love to talk about.

For Paul, Jesus' act of grace, poured out for us through his death on the cross, is everything. It shapes how he believes a Jesus-follower should live. A cross-shaped life.

Shaped *by* the cross into the shape *of* the cross.

We live the *vertical* life (*straight body*) of worship - loving *God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we live the horizontal life* (*arms open wide*) of loving our neighbor as ourself.²

These are the 2 core parts of being a Christ follower – worshipping God (*vertical*) and loving neighbour (*horizontal*).

Paul used the metaphor of the body, we are all one as part of it, with Christ as the head.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

We are all connected *in* Christ

We are held together in love

Joined and knitted together in the love of Christ.

It's all about love..

So with this background, we approach the passage that talks about husbands and wives.

Wouldn't it be simpler if it began with verse 21, *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,* and stopped there!?

Those of you who have been doing the weekly readings might have noticed that I dedicated a day to just this passage, I think it is so important!:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

But it does go on, it says:

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

² ([Matthew 22:36-40](#)).

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."

For centuries, men have regarded women as an inferior species. Paul lived in a world where women were not only regarded as lesser beings but also as impure. Their regular bodily functions were seen to make them dangerous for a man who wanted to maintain his own purity

Over the years, this passage has been taken literally, by so many, without examining the intent behind it. And sadly it has meant that in some cultures, and some families, men have seen themselves as superior, with ownership of their wives' bodies and will.

With a male dominance understanding of headship, how much have we all missed out on, men and women, by holding to a literal and limited understanding of this text?

Patrick Franklin from the Junia Project writes that it's important to point out what Paul does not say about the husband's headship in the relationship.

*He **does not** say that the husband is the sole or even primary decision-maker. He **does not** say that the husband is in charge of the family finances. He **does not** say that the wife's place is to be in the home while the husband's place is to be the sole breadwinner. He is **not** using 'head' in the sense that we often use it in English – as the head of a corporation, boss, chief officer, etc.*

He subverts and transforms headship language by redefining it in reference to Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples that the greatest ones in his kingdom are those who live to serve others. He said that he himself did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. As a display of his glory (John 13), Jesus stooped to wash the feet of his own disciples. And in an ultimate act of love and sacrifice, Jesus became a slave for us, dying a criminal's death on the cross to save us (Philippians 2:5-11).³

At the Assembly Standing Committee meeting, which I attended this weekend, Sureka Gorrige, National Director for Uniting World, was talking about how we are partnering with churches in the Pacific to address violence against women.

Some organisations are providing shelters, some are providing education and raising awareness. These are all really good. The Uniting Church and its partner churches are doing it through theology. They are teaching the men and women that *all* people are precious in God's eyes. That we are *all* to treat one another with mutual love and respect. That we are to show our love through mutual submission and not through power and control over one another.

This approach is providing transformational change in the culture there.

This is why we support the work of Uniting World!

³ <https://juniaproject.com/paul-turns-headship-head-ephesians-5/>

So, in some places there has been a shift. Women's rights have been recognised. Women are having the opportunity to express themselves and their gifts freely. Women are making amazing contributions to society.

Yet, there are times when this swings too far. How much advertising depicts the female as dominant and the male as plain dumb? I find it offensive. It is not only women who are dominated in relationships, men too can be victims of abuse – and that's even harder to talk about.

I dream of the day when we can see each other, whatever gender, whatever age, whatever race, whatever background, *in Christ*. Through the eyes of Christ.

I dream of the day when every woman, man and child can live in safety, safe to be who God has made them to be.

And yes, I claim a conflict of interest here! I am a female. I benefit from the women who have gone before me, struggling to find their voice and express the gifts they have been blessed with, and the men who have given them space to do so.

I am blessed in abundance by being married to Paul Driver, (not the *apostle* Paul!). The way he expresses his love for me, is nothing short of being *in Christ*. I am truly blessed.

Today we live in a different culture, a different context.

So how when we are *in Christ*, can we show love to our life partners?

It's all about love..

We submit to one another

Which means we are aware of the power we have and don't use it to coerce or abuse one another

We do what we can to bring the other joy

We want the best for the other

We talk openly about who has the gifts for taking the lead in various parts of our life together

We honour the decisions and the promises we have made

We provide an environment where both can flourish

We treasure one another

We pray for one another

We give each signs of love, in our words, our actions, our gifts, our care, our respect, our honesty.

And we do this knowing that we are all connected *in Christ*, we are held together in love, we are joined and knitted together in the love of Christ.

May these same qualities in relationships be echoed throughout the community, where friends and family show love and respect to one another, *in Christ*.

Amen

A prayer for relationships

We pray for the special relationships in our lives – either our own, or someone near and dear to us

Let's pause and consider that person or those people

your husband, wife, life partner

a dear friend maybe a sibling, a parent, a child

a work colleague

Whoever it is, picture them now

Picture them surrounded with God's abundant love and peace

Give thanks for all the ways they bless you

Give thanks for all the ways you bless them

If there is an area where you feel needs prayer, lift that before God now..

whether it be miscommunication, misuse of power, more attention shown to self than to the partner, love withheld, lack of forgiveness,.. whatever it might be... lift it before God and ask for God's grace to come into that situation, in Jesus name

If you are seeking direction in your own relationship, ask God for a clear pathway. Do you stay and invest in the relationship, praying for love and forgiveness, and a renewed closeness and even intimacy, if that is appropriate?

Or is it time to let go? In God's grace are you being released to seek healing outside of the relationship? In which case, do you have a safe place to go and be and heal? Please ask for support if you need it.

For those who are in happy healthy relationships, especially those celebrating anniversaries, this weekend, I pray for a fresh anointing over their marriages, with a sense of renewal and joy, and gladness in and for each other.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Further reading:

<https://juniaproject.com/5-myths-of-male-headship/>

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/thepeangeablog/2015/03/30/crucify-your-privilege/>