

EPHESIANS

Part 10: “The Mystery of Marriage”

Ephesians 5:21-32

Sunday, October 28, 2018

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Scripture Reading

21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. ¹

Introduction

- My friend Bryce went to law school and wanted to make an impact for the gospel
- He was trained in neighborhood outreach and apologetics
- After completing his first semester, he said, “I think the greatest impact I’ve been able to make is on my four-person study group, and its all been because of my marriage.”
- The way he talked about and treated his wife. The way he refused to talk about other women when it was just him and the guys. The way his wife treated him when they saw them together. It made a difference, and it led him to moments and opportunities to talk about Jesus.

- One of the pillars of our vision is culture.
- What if one of the primary ways we impact culture will be through marriage?

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Eph 5:21–33.

- *Healthy Christian marriages are one of the most powerful ways that the people of God can commend the Christian gospel to the watching world. Toxic Christian marriages are one of the most tragic ways the people of God can dishonor the Christian gospel to the watching world.*
- We are in the latter half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This letter has a two-fold structure. The first half is about the glory of the gospel. It about what Jesus has accomplished. Second half of this letter is about how all of our lives are to be molded and shaped by what Jesus has done. First half of Ephesians: gospel accomplished. Second half of Ephesians: gospel applied.
- Today, we are going to talk about this mysterious power of marriage and how it relates to the gospel. How we do marriage must be different if we truly believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Here are a few things that need to be said before we go further.
- To talk about the value of marriage in no way should devalue those in our body who are not married. Our value is not determined by whether or not we are married. Paul, who wrote this passage, is a single man. Elsewhere, notably in 1 Corinthians, he talks how the gospel can be displayed in one's singleness. Nevertheless, I think it is very valuable for single people to understand what the Bible has to say about marriage, even if it does not immediately apply to your current season of life. It is still part of God's perfect word.
- Secondly, if you are in a hurting marriage, I want to challenge you to know that there is redemptive hope in the gospel. As we talk about what a healthy marriage should look like, don't despair. Look for ways the Lord might be challenging you to walk toward a healthier marriage.
- So with that in mind, let's look at Ephesians 5 and "The Mystery of Marriage." We will organize our discussion under three main headings: *1.) The design of Christian marriage, 2.) The manner of Christian marriage, and 3.) The power of Christian marriage.*

Exposition

1. The Design of Christian Marriage

- Who gets to determine the morality on issues related to marriage? On what authority?
- Our culture is not doing great when it comes to marriage.
- We have one of the highest divorce rates in the world and one of the highest divorce rates in history.
- We need to question some of our cultural assumptions regarding marriage.
- *"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21, ESV)*

- All of marriage is motivated out of reverence for Christ is literally out of “fear” (φόβος) of Christ.
- Proverbs 1 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
- Ephesians 5 says the fear of Christ is the beginning of a healthy marriage.
- We must acknowledge that Christ has the right to speak authoritatively to issues that are hotly debated in our culture. In other words, there may be some ideas taught here or presupposed here that we would naturally buck up against.
- Rather than picking and choosing what we want to take from the Bible (like a cafeteria), we have to enter into a biblical framework.
- Over against our culture’s view of sexuality, the Bible teaches that God has designed human sexuality to flourish within the boundaries of a biblical marriage.
- Over against our culture’s view of marriage, the Bible teaches that God has designed marriage to exist as an enduring covenant union between one man and one woman.
- Over against our culture’s view of gender, the Bible teaches that God has created humanity with both male and female genders. The Bible teaches that men and women are created equally, but differently. Accordingly, there are some roles associated with husbands and wives that are intentionally designed and not interchangeable.
- Over against our culture’s view of individualism, the Bible teaches that if we want to find joy in marriage, we must seek to lay down our life in love for our spouse.
- All of the topics I just mentioned are massive ideas. I could preach a sermon on each of them, and I have. Check out the *Imago Dei* series on our podcast or website, if you want to know about how God designed manhood, womanhood, and marriage and sexuality. But for now, it is crucial for us to understand that if we want marriage to work, we have to understand it on God’s terms not our own.
- For God to be in authority, must mean that we are willing to be challenged and offended. The way that God’s word challenges us might feel mean.
- But the limitations that God set are not arbitrary or cruel.
- The limitations that God sets flow his desire to protect from death and lead us to life, joy, and flourishing.
- He limits us because he loves us.
- **Last week my youngest son Simon Peter tried to run into the street. My wife told him to stop, but he kept going and was purposely disobeying her. (We often do this when authority speaks to us). Then, we she took him inside, my wife had to speak loudly and firmly to him. When she did this, he cried and said she broke his heart. He still doesn’t understand that what to him looked like a game, my wife saw was a life or death issue. Two cars were coming from both directions. If they were to hit him, they would have killed him. So my wife spoke**

words that were authoritative, strong, and urgent. My wife limited my son because she loves him.

- **We play a lot of games with marriage, sexuality, and gender. God's word might break your heart. But he speaks truth and limitation because he loves us more than we could imagine. We need to believe that maybe he sees consequences that we can't see.**
- Lastly, as we look into marriage, I want us to carefully consider who these words are for. They are for the people of God. We should not have the expectation or aspiration to make everyone in the outside world see marriage the way we see marriage.
- In other words, the goal of Ephesians 5 is not to make people in the world embrace a Christian understanding of marriage. Rather, **the goal of Ephesians 5 is to get Christians to embrace a Christian understanding of marriage.**
- **If you are really concerned about how culture has defined the institution of marriage, but you are unconcerned about whether or not you are loving and respecting your spouse, you are doing it wrong. If we want to sanctify marriage, we must seek t marriages that embody goodness and truth and beauty.**

2. The Manner of Christian Marriage

For wives:

- ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*** (Ephesians 5:22–24, ESV)
- These words do not imply a lesser position (this is an abused an misunderstood passage)
- Likewise, these words are about wives in relation to their “own” husbands; not all women to all men
- This a passage about *how* to love (Eph. 5:1)
- Husbands feel loved when they feel respected
 - Submission is a voluntary, not coerced posture
 - Less like a private submitting to a sergeant and more like a letting a man “lead” dance; a mutuality with deference
 - Words and actions that reflect honor
 - Eve as a source of life for Adam and her family;
 - She was a helpmate or helper (of God and military alliances)
 - When men are loved this way they will rise to the occasion

- The most transforming and convicting times in my marriage are when my wife loves me while I'm being an idiot.
- Opposite: shame, manipulation, isolation (the curse of Eve to have her desire for or against her husband)
- Submission to headship only works when we understand the Christian vision of headship.
- These verses should never be a justification to submit to sin or abuse.
- This was a radical vision in the ancient world.
- In ancient Rome, sex, marriage, and gender were all over the place.
- The end of this was that people in power got to do what they want and use people however they wanted.
- The ancient world found marriage beautiful and attractive
 - Dignified people; particularly women
 - Set limitations on those who would use and abuse people

For husbands:

- *“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” (Ephesians 5:25–30, ESV)*
- Sacrificial love
 - Jesus gave himself completely with self-giving love, even unto death for his people
- This is *how* husbands are to walk in love
- Wives feel loved when they feel secure
 - Servant not tyrant; like Jesus in Jn. 13
 - Vulnerability and approachability; able to be confronted
 - The opposite is passive withdrawal or aggressive control through words and actions
- Washing with the word (□□μα)
 - Adam the cultivator and taxonomer
- Give your life to find it
- **When we model the cross, we experience resurrection**

For both husbands and wives:

- This is a covenantal bond based on a promise, not circumstances; the most binding promise that someone can make; it creates intimacy because it is binding
- The one-flesh union implies a unity; we are on the same team; we are not competing to win against the other person

- A commitment to think the best about the other person and his or her motives – not the worst
- To work through conflict in a healthy way: respect and sacrifice
- A commitment to **forgive well**, when the other person fails
- A commitment to **repent well**, when we fail
- A virtuous cycle of grace – respect and sacrificial love beget respect sacrificial love; the cycle of grace create closeness and intimacy
- A vicious cycle of performance – pain begets pain; withdrawal and wounding that create distance
 - How can I get what I want? How can I protect myself? How can I get my justice?
- The biblical vision of marriage is a beautiful vision that is utterly impossible to achieve in our own strength
- We cannot do this on our own

3. The Power of Christian Marriage

- ***It is the most important to do the right thing when it feels the least convenient and when it feels like your spouse least deserves it***
- For that reason, we need more than will-power
- We need love that comes from outside of us to empower us to love
- ***“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, ESV).***
- It only when we know in the depths of our being that Christ loved us when we least deserved to be loved that we will have the power to love one another in marriage.
- This is why, for Paul, marriage must come back to the gospel.
- ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:31–33, ESV)***
- The two becoming a one is a mystery, not math.
- We do not complete each other in marriage. Jerry Maguire was wrong!
- When we put messianic expectations on our spouse, we set our marriage up for failure.
- In fact, it is only when we find out completeness, our wholeness in Christ that we have the spiritual resources to love as we are called to love.
- Christ bled and died for you at your worst, your ugliest, your least worthy place.
- Let that truth collide with your heart.

- Let it change you.
- Let it empower you to love.

- May all of our lives flow from reverence to Christ
- May we know the power of his love
- May his love empower us to love one another and display the gospel

Community Group Discussion Questions

1. Summarize in your own words some of the big ideas from Ephesians 5:21-33.

2. In practical terms, what should it look like for Christian wives to submit to their husbands?

3. In practical terms, what should it look like for Christian husbands to sacrificially love their wives?

4. How should the truth of the gospel empower and motivate Christian marriages?

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