

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE AND THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:31-33 (No. 44)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Eph 5:22-33

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.

Verse 33 is a good place to begin, because in v. 33 Paul summarizes his teaching on how husbands and wives should relate to one another and summarizes what we’ve learned in the past few weeks about marriage

Eph 5:33: "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Here are the two summarizing commands that Paul gives to Spirit-filled husbands and wives.

To the husband, he repeats his command from v. 25.

There: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Here: (husbands is implied) “let each one of you love his wife as himself.”

The command to love is the same in both. The standards of a husband’s love for his wife are both “as Christ loved the church” and “as [they love] their own bodies” (which is a take on the Second Greatest Commandment to love your neighbor as yourself). A wife is a husband’s nearest and dearest neighbor.

So last week, we learned from v. 25-30 that husbands are to love their wives with:

- a sacrificial love (a ‘my life for yours’ kind of love),
- a sanctifying love (a love that seeks her highest spiritual good), and
- a supporting love (a love that supports her needs).

To the wife, Paul gives what looks like a new command, but is really the old command repackaged.

Here: “let the wife see that she respects her husband”

v. 22: “wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

The reason I say it is the same command repackaged is that the idea is the same in both. In v. 33, the word “respect” could be translated in *other* contexts “fear.” It’s the verbal form of the word ‘fear.’ This isn’t the first time Paul has used a form of the word ‘fear’ in this section of his letter. In verse 21, Paul writes that one of the results of being Spirit-filled is “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Reverence is the word, ‘fear.’ [fo,boj]

So on the front side of this section on marriage roles is a form of the word for ‘fear’ and on the back side of this section on marriage roles is a form of the word for ‘fear.’ This is a literary technique called an *inclusio*—it envelopes a section and pulls it together.

In verse 21, ‘reverence’ is a good translation. Spirit-filled Christians submit to one another according to the various roles we have. And the reason for that is our reverence for Christ. Because of who Christ is and our desire to obey him. Because of all he has done and our desire to. . . respect him. Christians recognize Christ as their supreme authority and therefore live with a kind of reverence.

In a similar way, Spirit-filled wives recognize that in the design of God he has placed husbands in the position of authority in the marriage relationship, and therefore Spirit-filled wives live respecting their husbands and their leadership.

Now that’s a summary of three weeks of sermons. And we can’t go into more detail than that for now without re-preaching all those sermons. Nevertheless, v. 33 does provide us with a good summary.

Transition

So this morning we want to pick up v. 31, 32. No verse in Scripture has changed my perspective on marriage more than v. 32. And the basis of verse 32 is verse 31. So we take them up together. These verses together reveal to us something about marriage that would be otherwise unknowable. These words convict us that we all have considered marriage too lightly. These words of God also inspire us to want to glorify God in marriage and in the support of marriage. Verses 31, 32 show us the mystery of marriage and the church, namely that marriage is from God and marriage is for God. That’s our outline: marriage is from God and marriage is for God.

First, in v.31, . . .

I. MARRIAGE IS FROM GOD

Eph 5:31: ““Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.””

Now Paul is quoting Genesis 2:24. This verse is the most fundamental statement about marriage in the OT and NT. So to understand why Paul is quoting Genesis 2:24, I want you to turn there with me. Genesis 2 is the account of the creation of man. It takes the overarching creation account from chapter 1 and zooms in on man. The climax of the chapter is the marriage of Adam and Eve. And the main point of it all is that marriage is from God.

Now the Scriptures teach us that Adam was made first.

Ge 2:7-8: "then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed."

So there is 'the man'—Adam. And he is alone in the garden. And from there, the story moves from the creation account of man to the creation account of marriage. And that happens **in four stages**.

First. . .

A. GOD MAKES A HELPER

Ge 2:18: "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.""

This occurs on Day 6—the day God made man in his image—both male and female. By the end of Day 6, God looks at everything that he has made and 1:31 says it was "very good."

But at this point in Day 6, there is still something "not good." That doesn't mean there was something bad about creation. It means that the Day wasn't complete. Something hadn't yet been done that was needful. What wasn't yet done in order to make the day "very good" was that Adam didn't have a helper fit for him. It doesn't mean Adam needed someone to help get groceries. He was capable of doing that. What was needed was a helper to fulfill the command that God would give by the end of the day. And we read that command in 1:28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. . ." That Adam can't do on his own. He has no means of propagating the human race. He has no way of creating offspring. So it was "not good that man should be alone."

Now, it's surprising what God does next. You know the outline of the story, so you'd think God would make Eve next. After all, why wait? But he doesn't do that. Look what happens next in vv. 19-20:

Ge 2:19-20: "Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field."

So God first parades all the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens before Adam so that he could name them. Naming the animals would demonstrate that man would have dominion or authority over animals. It shows that man is higher than animals. . . And it also shows that man is not of the animals.

After all the animals and birds have been paraded before Adam, what does he find? The last sentence of v. 20: "But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him." He is alone. No companion for him. No one like him. So what does God do?

Ge 2:21-22: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

We've got to clear up a little misconception here. See that word "ribs"? That's how it has been traditionally interpreted. And I think that because it's traditional, it's sort of stuck, even though a better word might be used. Ribs is certainly one meaning of the word. But more generally and more regularly it's interpreted more literally as "sides." In fact, outside of this context I don't think it's ever translated as ribs anywhere else in the OT. Lit: "and he took one from his sides" And maybe there was some rib in there because later Adam says she is, "bone of my bone," but he also says she is "flesh of my flesh." But the point is that he took out part of Adam's side, not so much which parts he took out. So, just so we're all on the same page, today, men and women have the same number of ribs. So from Adam's bone and flesh, God made Eve. So that's stage 1 of the creation account of marriage: God makes a helper.

The second stage is. . .

B. GOD GIVES AWAY THE BRIDE

Look at v. 22 again more closely:

Ge 2:22: "And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

The first Father of the Bride was God himself. John Piper in his excellent book, *This Momentary Marriage*, says this: "[God] didn't hide her and make Adam seek. He made her; then he brought her. In a profound sense, he had fathered her. And now, though she was his by virtue of creation, he gave her to the man in this absolutely new kind of relationship called marriage. . . "

The bringing together of Adam and Eve wasn't happenstance. This is all being orchestrated by God. At every stage, God is forming marriage. At every stage, marriage is from God.

The third stage is that. . .

C. GOD SETS THE PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE

Ge 2:23: "Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.""

So that just means that Adam is excited! But look at v. 24. This is the verse that Paul quotes.

Ge 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Briefly, the pattern that God establishes is (1) "man shall leave his father and his mother."

That is, a new family unit will be formed. He'll still be related to his parents, but there is a break from them. Part (2) of the pattern is a man shall "hold fast to his wife." That has the idea of a permanent union. When Paul quotes this verse in Greek, he uses a word that has the idea of 'gluing together.' In fact, in the Greek, the noun form of the word is 'glue.' Same idea here in the Hebrew. And part (3) is "they shall become one flesh." We'll take up that phrase in just a moment.

Now here's something interesting: The narrator of this story uses the word "therefore." In other words, on the basis of how God made Eve and brought her to Adam, the narrator is drawing a conclusion. And the conclusion ultimately is that they become one flesh in this union. But the way it starts out doesn't apply to either Adam or Eve. It says that "a man shall leave his father and mother." But Adam didn't have a father or mother. He was created by God himself just as the narrator himself just wrote in v. 7. So what's going on here? And the answer is that this union of Adam and Eve is a pattern for all marriages to come.

- One man. One woman.
- Brought together by God.
- Leaving family to form a new family.
- Forming a permanent union with each other.
- And becoming in marriage one flesh.

That's what marriage *is*. God created marriage, so he defines marriage. You can't redefine what it is. If you call some other relationship 'marriage,' it isn't marriage. So how the Supreme Court defines marriage doesn't determine what marriage really is. Marriage is from God. It was his idea. He created it. He established the pattern. Only God can determine what marriage is. No President. No legislature. No panel of judges can ever overrule the decree of God which defined marriage as it really is. Those in politics don't have that kind of power. Marriage between two men or two women or between animals or man and animal or between more than two people isn't marriage. It doesn't matter what it is called. It's a farce. It's a lie.

We can talk about *so-called* same-sex marriage, but we can't talk about *same sex marriage* because it isn't a marriage. The label may be slapped on the sinful relationship. The laws may change and afford benefits to people in those relationships. But we will not bow to our culture and call a relationship something that we know is a lie and offends God. To do so would be unloving. Calling so-called same sex marriage a marriage doesn't build a bridge to the gospel, it undermines the gospel because it's a bridge of lies.

So, the creation story of marriage occurs in four stages: first, God makes a helper. Then, God gives away the bride. Third, God sets the pattern for marriage. And finally. . .

D. GOD FORMS THE ONE FLESH UNION

Ge 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

So out of one—Adam—came another—Eve. And when God joined them together in marriage—the two became one.

And the reason I know positively that God forms the one flesh union is because of what Jesus said in Matt 19:

Mt 19:3-6: "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

So when a marriage happens, the two—a male and a female—become one. And that happens because God makes it happen.

- Marital union doesn't happen on the wedding night.
- The couple's intentions don't make a union.
- The pastor performing the wedding who pronounces them 'man and wife' doesn't make the union (he simply is recognizing it).
- A judge can't make a union.
- Laws can't make a union.

The pattern of marriage that God established makes the union—whether the couple are believers or unbelievers. But the only union that can occur is between a man and a woman (complimentary pairs). So the refrain of Genesis 2 in the creation account of marriage is God. *God* makes a helper. *God* gives away the bride. *God* sets the pattern for marriage. *God* forms the one flesh union. Marriage is God's doing. So I conclude, marriage is from God.

The second point in our outline is. . .

II. MARRIAGE IS FOR GOD

And for this, we return to Ephesians 5:32.

Eph 5:32: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

As we've seen before in Ephesians, a "mystery" is something previously unknown but revealed by God. So what's "this mystery" refer to? In context, Paul has been talking about how the church is united with Christ.

Eph 5:29-30: "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."

Believers are part of Christ. Then in v. 31 Paul immediately cites Gen. 2:24 without any additional words. He borrows the "therefore" that starts v. 31 directly from Genesis. And at first, it seems like the quote doesn't quite fit with the flow. He's talking about believers being part of Christ's body and then comes a quote about marriage. But the reason he includes the quote is for the final words of v. 31: "'and the two shall become one flesh.'" And the next words of Paul are "this mystery is profound." So what's the mystery? The answer has to be the 'one flesh union of husbands and wives.' But why is that a mystery? By itself, it isn't a mystery—it isn't a previously hidden plan of God that has now been revealed.

God's people have known ever since Moses wrote Genesis that marriage was the uniting of two into one flesh. That's not a mystery. . . until he gets to the end of v. 32. And what he says is simply stunning.

v. 32: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." {p}

What Paul is revealing to us that no one knew before God revealed it to Paul is that Gen. 2:24 is a kind of prophecy. Yes, "the two shall become one flesh" refers to husband and wife united in marriage. But now we know it's more. When God made marriage at the beginning of creation, he was at that moment already pointing to something greater—which will outlast marriage and go on forever. What even Moses (who wrote Genesis) didn't know was that marriage was designed by God from the very beginning to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage was created to be a living parable.

In other words, when God created marriage, he had another purpose besides uniting husband and wife. He created marriage so that it would be a beautiful picture of a relationship that hadn't yet been conceived—the future relationship of Christ and the church. {p}

- With the husband playing the role of Christ.
- And the wife playing the role of the church.
- With the husband assuming leadership of the family, as Christ does the church.
- And with the wife submitting to the husband, as the church does to Christ.

This means that when Paul wrote this letter to Ephesus and decided to exhort the church about marriage, he didn't just select an illustration at random—as if he said, "I know what would be a helpful metaphor to talk about marriage: the relationship between Christ and the church." All these allusions to Christ and the church that we've seen from verse 22 to 33—these aren't just good teaching illustrations. It's more than that.

God didn't design marriage *merely* to populate the earth—though that's one reason. Another reason that he designed marriage—a reason that wouldn't be revealed for thousands of years until Christ came, died, and rose again to redeem a new people—was to picture this the great love between Christ and his people. Think of it: at the moment of Adam and Eve's wedding, God was already thinking of Christ and the church.

"This mystery is profound—and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

The words from Gen 2:24: "and they shall become one flesh" is what happens to all God saves by the gospel. We are united as one into Christ's own body. And now we who are married have the great opportunity, to live out this truth in our marriages. We live the parable of Christ and the church. We live that picture.

CONCLUSION

So, the ultimate meaning of marriage isn't about satisfying your emotional, relational and physical needs. It's bigger than you. And though love is essential to marriage, *staying* married isn't even about staying in love.

Because marriage portrays Christ's love for the church—and Jesus will never divorce his church. And so our marriages in the church should reflect that great reality.

So let us never belittle the worth of marriage. Let us highly esteem marriage. Let the value of marriage in our hearts be shown in the way we talk about marriage, the way we feel about marriage. College students and singles, you may have seen a thousand bad marriages and decide you want nothing to do with it. But in light of Paul has said here, that's a terrible reason to decide you don't want to be married.

No, we who are Christ's own Bride should honor marriage—even if we aren't married or won't ever be married. We should desire the church be filled with beautiful portraits of the beautiful relationship between Christ and the church.

So will you pray with me to that end?