



The Mystery of Marriage

Ephesians 5: 22-33

I. INTRO

A. A little girl had just seen Snow White for the first time.

1. She was so excited that she could hardly **contain herself**, she retold the story to her mother.
2. After telling about how Prince Charming had arrived on his beautiful white horse and kissed Snow-White out of her deep sleep, she asked her mother, "And do you know what happened next?"
 - a. "Yes," said her mom, "they lived happily ever after."
 - b. "No," the little girl said, "they got married."

B. Today we will be addressing Christian marriage here in Eph 5.

C. Review: The context of Ephesians 5 is a call for (all) Christ-followers to love, serve, defer, and submit to one another.

1. We see this in the first two verses as well as in v. 21:

- a. Eph 5:1-2: *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..."* -- Ephesians 5:1-2 (See also Phil 2:5-7)

Phil 2:5-8: *"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

What we see in Phil 2 is that Jesus is serving and deferring to the other persons of the Trinity. Just as the persons of the Trinity each have distinct roles, they continually honor and defer to the other, what we will see in our passage for today is that husbands and

wives also have distinct roles and are to honor and defer to the other.

- b. This imperative of mutual submission is also clearly seen in Eph 5:21: *“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”* --Ephesians 5:21
2. V. 21 is the way we are to engage one another in a **general way**, honoring and deferring to one another within the body of Christ—and then beginning in v. 22 Paul gets **specific about marriage** and family and social relationships.
3. I am aware that some of the biblical concepts and principles that we will be dealing with today have been abused. Rather than specifically addressing those abuses today, I would rather address the biblical concept of marriage. If you have questions about what you would consider to be biblical concepts or principles that **HAVE** been abused, you can send an email to info@communitycovenant.church and I will do my best to respond – either with my own current understanding, or by pointing you to resources.

II. BODY

A. (A lot, **but not all** of what I have to say today I have learned from Tim Keller’s preaching and writing.) There are two main points that I would like to address—and the second point has three sub-points:

1. How does the Bible define marriage?
2. What is the primary purpose of marriage?
 - a. To refine us
 - b. To realign us
 - c. To refocus us

A. Now we will look at each one individually...

1. How does the Bible define marriage?
 - a. The defining essence of marriage is stated clearly in Genesis 2:24 (and quoted by Paul in 5:31): *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*
 - 1) The KJB uses the word *“cleave,”* which conveys the strength of the Hebrew verb. It is a word that literally means to be glued

to something. In the Bible, this word means to unite to someone through making a covenant.¹

- 2) What's a covenant? "A deep exclusive permanent legal and personal binding commitment."² We see covenants literally everywhere in the Bible. We have an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. There are horizontal covenants between various people and nations, as well as vertical covenants between God and individuals, families, and entire nations.
- b. In sharp contrast with our secular culture, the Bible teaches that, Marriage is a sacrificial covenant between one man and one woman that is primarily for the good of the other. Do you know what this means? Marital love is more fundamentally action than emotion.
- 1) In ancient and more traditional cultures family was the ultimate value in life. Couples would generally have as many children as possible to help work the land. So, marriage was often viewed as a social transaction that helped the larger family's interests—a way of doing your duty to family, tribe, and society. (This seems odd and scary to us in the 21st century.)
 - 2) By contrast, in our modern western culture we tend to value chemistry over covenant, and in our culture, we tend to stay connected to people (including spouses) only as long as they are meeting our particular needs. The idea of "covenant" seems to be fading in our culture (and perhaps in the Church as well??).
- c. The essence of the biblical teaching on marriage is not so much a declaration of present love, as it is the binding promise of future love.
- 1) It's a promise not to expect to feel warm and loving all the time, but to be loving and tender, and faithful, and serving regardless of the ups and downs of emotions or circumstances of life.

¹ Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22; Joshua 22:5; 23:8. See especially Deut 10:20: "*Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Cleave to him and take your oaths in his name.*"

² Tim Keller.

- 2) Marriage is a focused commitment to see our spouse flourish and thrive—even at great cost to ourselves.
 - d. Finally, in defining marriage, it is important to see that Paul is saying that marriage is a precursor, or foretaste, of the coming consummation of Jesus and His bride—the Church. Here’s a way we can think about it: God does not exist to make much of marriage; marriage exists to show the world the glory of Jesus Christ and His Church. (Marriage is a binding promise of future love.)
2. What is the primary purpose of marriage? (to refine, realign, and refocus)
 - a. To refine us.
 - 1) The primary purpose of Jesus Christ coming into our lives is to bring about change that we cannot accomplish through our own strength or willpower. Jesus wants to make us spiritually radiant and beautiful.
 - 2) We must begin with the admission that we are flawed and broken people. (CCC will never be an “affirming” church because we are all broken, and Jesus does not affirm anyone’s lifestyle. However, we are an “accepting” church—willing to accept anyone who walks through the doors.) When we see and come to grips with our brokenness, we can begin to recognize what the purpose of marriage is—and for what our spouse comes into our life to accomplish.
 - 3) We want to be with a person who understands what God is trying to do in our lives: *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”*--Philippians 1:6 (NASB)
 - a) What is that *“good work”*? At this point, you and I are just a shadow of what we are supposed to be. There are initial attractions, but there is also a need to see in the other person what God is creating.
 - b) Sometimes we get glimpses of the future, the calling, the wisdom, the courage, the potential of a person.
 - c) (Illus) I have never personally visited the Grand Canyon, yet I’ve flown over it maybe 100 times. Often when I’ve flown over it, I’m in the wrong seat or on the wrong side

of the airplane, or it's cloudy. But one day, I was in the right place at the right time and it was crystal clear outside, and I had this grand view of the Grand Canyon—and it took my breath away! That's how we **are** as married couples—every so often the clouds part—and we catch these grand glimpses of one another, and we see their potential.

- 4) Christian marriage is a **unique and intense form** of Christian fellowship. What we need is someone who comes into our lives and says, “I love you – and I am also excited about who God is making you to be. I see the great thing that God is doing, and I want to be a part of that because it excites me.”
- 5) That is the purpose of marriage. To refine (cleanse and heal) and **partner with God** in achieving our divine potential. There are three very practical applications:
 - a) Expect confrontation. Marriage will confront the things in our lives in a way that no other relationship has been able to do. We will need to come out of denial. Marriage is like a gem tumbler – two rough stones that need to be smoothed out.
 - b) If you are single, broaden the scope of potential spouses (i.e., throw away your “list” and work on yourself).
 - c) While chemistry is important, there is nothing more attractive than to be loved by someone you respect.

b. To realign us. (2nd primary purpose of marriage)

- 1) The Bible provides us with the way to complement one another in marriage for the vitality and enrichment of the whole relationship, between two individuals who are equal in dignity and value.
- 2) You will notice from our passage that the roles of the husband and wife are **distinctive**. There are differences between the genders in a marriage relationship. (3 spheres?)
 - a) There is no doubt that in our passage Paul treats the husband as symbolic of Christ and the wife as symbolic of the Church.

- b) Paul's instruction here is designed to **reverse the sin of Eden**, where the woman usurped her husband's authority and the man relinquished his sacrificial leadership.
- 3) These unique roles are meant to be an expression of the unchanging gospel dynamics of Christ's relationship to the Church and the Church's relationship to Christ.³
- 4) To get more specific, in this text, Paul is insisting that the husband should take-on Jesus Christ as his role model. The Church became the bride of Christ, not by being dragged off unwillingly, but because Jesus gave Himself totally and entirely for her—it was an act of complete, self-abandoning love.⁴ (So, what's our call, guys??)
- c. To refocus us. (3rd primary purpose of marriage)
- 1) In both the OT and NT God is described as a husband and His people are described as His bride. This is not just a metaphor. It points, according to Rev 19:7-8, that someday the marriage supper between God and His Church (the bride) will take place. We've been calling this the **consummation** of the kingdom of God.
- 2) Human marriage is designed to **refocus us and point us to THAT** ultimate marriage. Even the most wonderful rapturous episode of marital love is just a dim hint of the ecstasy and cosmic joy of falling into the Lord's arms.⁵ **That** is what we were created for.
- 3) Human love becomes part of the sanctification process that prepares us for the ultimate marriage between God and His Church. Unless we see that we won't be single well and we won't be married well.
- a) Singles: Whether you are desperately wanting to be married or you are completely content to not be

³ Adapted from *Gospel Transformation Bible Study Notes*, Eph 5:22-27.

⁴ Adapted from N.T. Wright, *For Everyone Commentary Series*, Eph 5:21-33.

⁵ Tim Keller.

married; either way, know the ultimate marriage awaits you.

b) Marrieds: Don't try and get from your marriage what only Jesus can give you...

4) (Illus) Linda has been an excellent example to me of this. She differentiates well what she needs from God and what she expects from me.

III. CONCLUSION

A. As we draw to a close, the **great mystery** of marriage is not that it's hard. Our relationship **with God** and **one another** is---and will continue to be both hard AND glorious.

1. The "*mystery*" is that marriage helps us to better understand what the gospel is truly about. Again, God does not exist to make much of your marriage, your marriage exists to make much of God.
2. I would like you to notice in our text for today that it does **not** say who should have the final say in important marital decisions.
3. We must keep the Trinity in mind here⁶—they are constantly honoring and deferring to one another. And we must also keep in mind the complete, self-abandoning love that Jesus demonstrated by going to the cross on our behalf.

B. Concluding thoughts...

1. If you are here today or watching online, and your marriage is struggling—or beginning to struggle, the first step is to admit that we can't fix it on our own. Willpower does not make for a strong and stable marriage. One of you needs to make the first move (guys?). Get on your knees and ask for God's help. And then get in a CG.
2. Finally, if you're here today or watching online and you have never fully surrendered your (whole) life to Jesus Christ, I would urge you to do that today. A simple prayer...Lord, I've tried to do life on my own and. I want to become the man/woman that You have called me to be. I confess my sinfulness to You and I repent of my sins, and I surrender my heart and my life to you today.

⁶ The Trinity is a major sub-theme in Ephesians.

Community Group Questions

1. In your life, what person has been the greatest example of both unconditional love and truth telling?
2. Practically speaking, identify some traits or behaviors of what mutual submission looks like—first in a church, and then in a marriage?
3. Jesus did not regard equality a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself and became a bondservant⁷ (Phil 2:6-7). What might that look like in our 21st century cultural context? Or, in the church?
4. “The essence of the biblical teaching on marriage is not so much a declaration of present love, as it is the binding promise of future love.” As you consider this (Tim Keller) quote, what comes to mind? How might this perspective change your day-to-day view of marriage?
5. What might be some ways that those of us who are married, might be able to pull out of a marriage “rut” and begin to proactively take on a more biblical perspective of marriage?
6. What are some ways we can help each other to see and grow in a holy dependence on Jesus to become the people we were created to be?

⁷ This is a biblical principle that has been severely abused. Slave owners used to “preach” this principle to slaves.