

Unity in Diversity

Prepare for this discussion by reading Ephesians in one sitting. If you have time, read it over again. Make note of the general themes of the letter.

Understanding and teaching Ephesians 5-6 requires great attention to detail. The task carries massive implications for how we live our everyday life.

To say that this section of Scripture generates controversy today would be an understatement. We must, therefore, begin this week where we left off at the end of our study of Revelation: The Bible is the Word of God because it is God's revelation of Himself to mankind. Therefore, the Bible carries an authoritative weight to which we must submit every area of our lives.

That being said, none of us are perfectly obedient to Scripture.

We are in a process of sanctification in which submission to Christ is done more and more joyfully and willingly as we grow. Furthermore, we often have disagreements about the best way to interpret the revealed will of God.

Our disagreements do not in any way diminish the authority of Scripture. What they do is simply demonstrate that none of us have a perfect vision for the will of God.

Sanctification is a process into which the church is called to engage together. The controversy around the Bible's teaching on family life should cause us to dig deeper into studying the Bible so we can more clearly see what God has in mind for living within a family unit.

These background teachings from the OT control how we interpret the household codes of Ephesians:

- In the Bible, male and female are two distinctly different genders that have distinctly different God designed characteristics.
- God literally made gender (male and female) for the purpose of marriage; therefore, gender has its highest purpose in marriage.
- God made Eve out of Adam for Adam to understand that Eve was one with him (one flesh). Therefore, Adam was not to view his headship of her in the manner of his headship over the rest of creation, but rather he was to view his headship of her within the one flesh covenant bond he has with her. Just as God was in covenant with Adam and thus Adam reigned over creation with Him, Adam was also in covenant with Eve and therefore he was to live in submission to God and rule over creation as one with her.

Our current set of hot topic cultural issues reveals just how relevant these 3500-year-old teachings are for us today.

As I read Matthew 19:4-6, I am reminded of a personal peeve that comes about whenever I

debate these hot topics with people who claim to know the Bible well. It is often argued that Jesus never addressed gender identity, homosexuality, or “gay marriage.”¹

My response goes something like this:

“Of course Jesus did not address the current events of today the way that we wish he would have. He was a Jewish man living in Palestine in the first century.

“Gender identity, homosexuality, and gay marriage were terms that could not even have been conceived by the Jewish cultures of Palestine in the first century. While same-gendered sexual activity may have occurred in defiance of the Mosaic Law, being gay as a way of living the totality of one’s life simply did not exist in first century Palestine.

“Homosexuality as a term was not invented until 1892. The hot topic around marriage in Jesus’ day was divorce, and he did not shy away from addressing it forcefully, emphatically, and based on the conviction that the Word of God could not be broken by changing cultural attitudes.

“Jesus does address our current hot topics by affirming as true what God has told us from the beginning; God created male and female. God created sex and marriage exclusively for the lifelong covenantal union of a male and a female.”

I am extremely thankful that as a theological position, Venture Church does not leave an open-ended question where Jesus has put a period. Our only question is how to engage folks in Gospel conversations who may struggle with what Jesus has said so that we can point them to the person of Jesus and not to our own cultural opinions.

“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”
Ephesians 5:18

“submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
Ephesians 5:21

Ephesians 1-4 goes into great detail about the reasons that we are called to have unity in Christ.

¹ I have to place quotation marks around “gay marriage” because it is a logical impossibility. The authoritative dictionary on the English language, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, in its 2nd edition from 1989 defines marriage first as “the condition of being husband and wife.” The first known recorded use of the word in English dates all the back to 1297. A committed relationship between two men or two women, regardless of whether you believe it is good or bad, cannot be called marriage because there is not a husband and a wife. The only way to logically conclude there is such a thing as gay marriage is to presuppose that words have no fixed meaning and can be changed at any given moment to mean something directly contradictory to the meaning they held just five minutes earlier. Such a philosophy of language would make human communication utterly incomprehensible.

Then Ephesians 5 gives us two very practical pieces about how to live in unity in the church. It is no mistake that before we can even begin to talk about living as a Christian family we have to learn to do two things in the church:

1. Be filled with the Spirit
2. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ

The point of the Old Testament teaching on marriage that is getting ready to be applied to the church is that the strength of unity comes from the diversity of the individual pieces. The family is a picture of the church and the church is the picture of a solid family.

How does this play out?

A church is supposed to be made up of a bunch of people who are totally and completely NOT like one another. The beauty of the Gospel is that we are unified by the blood of Jesus with people with whom the world would tell us that we are enemies.

Think about the different types of diversity that are supposed to exist in the church:

- Racial
- Ethnic
- Gender
- Emotional makeup
- Economic
- Education-level
- Family Background
- Place of Origin
- Language of Birth
- Political views
- Musical tastes
- Styles of dress
- Personalities
- Struggles with Sin
- Age

Despite all of these differences, the church is completely and totally unified in salvation, baptism, communion, fellowship, love, worship, seeking justice, and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Our differences do not go away. In fact, if our differences went away, the church would be weaker and become something less than what God intended for it to be.

- How is diversity present in this life group?
- How is this diversity a strength?
- Would you be able to find as much help for your marriage and your relationship with Christ if everyone else were exactly like you?

Now, we need to apply the way we think about diversity in the church to the way we think about diversity in marriage. I don't know a man alive who hasn't said "I do not understand women at all." Most days, I think Jennifer has a hard time understanding me as well.

When God created male and female, he created two genders who would be completely and totally unlike one another. That's not a bad thing. It's the genius of God's creative design.

This is not to say that some men won't be like most women in some ways and some women

won't be like most men in some ways. Liking to cook and garden does not make me less of a man. Liking sports does not make a woman less of a woman. However, at the end of the day, you will be married to someone who seems like they arrived from a different planet.

I am convinced that God wired me to fall in love with Jennifer because her personality is soooooooooo different from mine. God knew that I needed somebody who had a wisdom of perspective that was completely foreign to my own. Our differences often lead to conflicts and communication becomes something that requires a lot of effort. But the end result of what we gain from being married to someone who is other makes us much stronger together than we could have been separately.

In talking to a lot of young people over the years, I believe that the general self-centeredness of our culture has ultimately led to the decline in the family.

There are many non-Christian cultures that have strong family structures. The common element of those cultures is that they teach their children to think of themselves as a we instead of a me. Marriage simply will not thrive when its chief concern is two people taking an attitude about what they can selfishly gain from the marriage (even though marriage does ultimately have great benefits for the self.)

The decline in marriage and the rise in the notion of homosexual unions is that people are told from an early age that the greatest good in life is to seek relationships only with people who understand them, who make them feel good about themselves, and for whom the relationship does not feel like it requires work.

In a non-sexual way, the idea of living in a frat house with lots of other young men who enjoy all of the same interests sounds like an awesome idea to an eighteen-year-old kid. The eighteen-year-old eventually realizes, however, that when everybody in a house behaves like a frat-bro it will usually descend into filth and disorder. The idea of a woman "civilizing" the home becomes attractive once a young man learns what it means to not have a mom present.

When God created marriage, he then called the world "very good." Men and women need one another in ways that are foundational to our very being.

- How are you and your spouse not like one another?
- How does that lead to conflict?
- How is that a good thing?
- How does a single person still benefit from friendship with people of the opposite sex?
- Does our culture do a good job of preparing men and women to respect one another? Why or Why not?
- What role do Ephesians 5:18 and 5:21 play in your own friendships and marriage?
- How can you begin to function interdependently with your spouse instead of as two individuals who occasionally support one another?