

FAMILY

The Way for a Husband

November 19, 2017

Ephesians 5:25-33

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.

Here’s where the men want to stop reading: **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** (verse 25). No Christian woman would object for a single moment to be in submission to her husband, if her husband were Jesus Christ. Obviously the Bible calls wives to be in subjection to husbands who are not Jesus Christ, but the responsibility that is given to the man here is terrifying: to love their wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself for the church. Would a woman be afraid to submit herself to a man who loved her as much as Jesus loved the church? Would a woman fight and kick and scream against the leadership of a man who was willing to give his lifeblood to do anything he could to save her life? The kind of rule that the husband is to have over his wife is to be modeled on the leadership of Jesus.

Some husbands respond, ‘I’ll love my wife as Christ loved the church, as soon as she starts to submit herself to me!’ But that’s not how Christ loved the church. Christ loved a church that was not submissive to him. Christ died for a church that was in rebellion against him. Some wives will say, ‘I will subject myself to my husband, when he starts loving me.’ No, they have a responsibility before God to conduct themselves according to the word of God in their marriage.

Why did Christ die? **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 (verses 26, 27).

Ceremonial baths were a regular feature in Jewish customs. Probably Paul is alluding here to the particular bath a bride underwent prior to her marriage ceremony. Symbolically, defilement was washed away, and purity was reinstated.

For the Christian, Paul may be saying that a similar cleansing unto holiness is effected by two agencies: the 'washing of water' and 'through the word'. Baptism, the washing of water, is said by Calvin to be the outward symbol by which the inner and invisible work of sanctification is confirmed. This external rite must, however, be accompanied by the second means, the application of the word of the gospel. Scripture becomes the means by which the Spirit accomplishes his work of sanctification—the process of becoming holy and blameless. Diligent attention to the Scriptures is the ordained means by which God conforms us to the image of his Son, burning away the dross of sin that so thoroughly pollutes our lives. Jesus' intention for his bride is to present her to the Father in her full splendour, without spot or wrinkle. He only wants the best for her.

That is the pattern that husbands are to follow: **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 his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church** (verses 28, 29). One of the most wonderful parts of the marriage ceremony is the vow that we take to cherish one another. To cherish one another means to hold one another in the highest esteem and to place an infinite value on one another. This is the attitude that is to permeate the home. Not a power struggle or a see-saw battle for more authority than the other one. Rather, the man is to love his wife as he loves his own flesh. A man takes care of his own flesh. He feeds himself, eats, drinks, nourishes his body and protects it. He has a strong instinct of self-preservation. He is to love his wife even more than he loves himself.

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' The mystical goal of marriage is the union of two people. That union does not annul or annihilate individual personalities. This stands in stark contrast to Eastern religions where the loss of personal identity takes place in the mystical union of marriage. In Christianity, the union is very profound. People become of one mind, one concern, and one passion. That goes deep in a healthy marriage; the two are like one person.

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (verse 32). Notice how Paul keeps weaving this theme through Ephesians. Earlier he had talked about the church as the body of Christ in the mystical union that is shared by all who participate in fellowship with Christ (see pages 88–91).

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (verse 33). Probably the most fragile mechanism in the whole creation is the male ego. One of the most difficult things to admit or to understand is that

there is probably nothing that a man wants more from his wife than her admiration. There is probably nothing that a woman wants more from her husband than his attention, taking her seriously and treating her with the greatest dignity. Here what we are getting at is the question of respect. If I exercise my headship over my wife in a tyrannical way, I am not respecting my wife. If my wife gives slavish obedience to me without any love, she is not respecting me. The whole basis of the relationship is built upon love, cherishing and respecting one another.¹

32

Loving Husbands, Happy Wives

Ephesians 5:21–33

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as 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 his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, 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.

I title this second study of Ephesians 5:21–33 as I do because of Paul’s clear instructions and desire in the passage. But I admit, as I begin, that this or any other title commending marriage is a bit of an embarrassment in our day. That is because many of today’s marriages are in dreadful shape, and anything other than pessimistic comments makes people uneasy and even hostile when the subject comes up.

¹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (pp. 135–141). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

Let me give some examples. My wife and I have been married twenty-five years. A few weeks after our wedding, Linda was with a group of old girlfriends, all of whom had been married for a couple years, and she said something about how happy she was to be married. The reply of one friend was a put-down. She retorted, "Whom are you trying to convince, us or yourself?"

Recently a friend and I were discussing the upcoming marriage of a certain couple. Both are Christians; they have known each other for a reasonable length of time; they are in early middle age, so they should know their minds in the matter. But my friend's comment—widely heard today—was: "I surely hope it works out." It was a pessimistic assessment with no real cause except the general failure of so many marriages in our time.

I have heard young people say, "I am never going to get married, because I have never known a married person who was happy."

God Calls It "Good"

What is the problem? Part of the problem is that we live in a sinful world where nothing is as perfect as we would like it, and marriage by its very nature opens us up to deep hurts. We are vulnerable in marriage, and we are therefore disappointed and hurt by its failures as we are not equally hurt by shortfalls in other relationships. The chief problem, however, is that we have forgotten God's guidelines for marriage. So we suffer marriage breakdowns just as we would suffer the breakdown of our automobiles if we disregarded the manufacturer's instructions for their maintenance.

The place to begin in any discussion of marriage is with the fact that marriage is God's idea and that it is a good idea. It is a good idea, because it comes from God who never had a bad idea.

I remind you of the creation account in Genesis where marriage is first established and described. Up to this point God had been calling each of his creative acts good. But when he finished creation (except for the creation of the woman), looking at man in his aloneness, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). The one thing in all creation that was not good in God's judgment was the man in his aloneness, without the woman. God's creation of the woman was the completion and perfection of his creative acts. Marriage was the great "good" that topped creation. It follows, then, that marriage *is* good—regardless of what we make of it—and that failed marriages, which we see about us and which seem to be increasing, are the result of our failures rather than God's.

The Duty of Wives

Our real failure is that we do not follow God's directions for marriage. This is what Paul is concerned with in Ephesians, as he gives instructions first to the wife and then to the

husband. To the wives he says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as 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” (vv. 22–24).

I want to admit at this point that in my frequent teaching about marriage, particularly in the many wedding services I conduct each year, I have tended to move slightly away from what this passage teaches. The passage teaches that wives are to be submissive to their husbands and that husbands are therefore to exercise a certain headship over wives. This is unpalatable teaching, of course, particularly because of the so-called women’s liberation movement.

Trying to be sensitive to the legitimate concerns of women’s advocates, I have sometimes approached the matter of submission in this fashion. I have pointed out that the instructions given to wives are preceded by a verse which says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21). As a matter of fact, the verb translated “submit” is actually a participle in Greek, which links it to the verbs that come before. They are participles too, and they tell what it means to be “filled with the Spirit”: “*speaking* to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” “*singing* and *making melody* in your hearts to the Lord,” and “*giving thanks* to God the Father for everything” (vv. 19–20).

These are things every Spirit-filled Christian should do, and “submitting” is likewise one of those things. Why then does Paul say that wives in particular are to submit to their husbands? I was tending to say, “It is because this is something wives have a particular difficulty doing.” Likewise, “Paul tells husbands to love their wives, because this is something husbands have difficulty doing, or at least doing well.”

However, this is not a fair treatment of the passage. True, wives do have difficulty submitting to their husbands, and husbands do have trouble properly loving their wives. But to approach the matter of submission this way is greatly to lessen Paul’s teaching.

The reason I say this is that submission is the major concern of the apostle, not only in these verses, but in the entire passage leading up to a description of the Christian’s spiritual warfare in chapter 6. He offers three examples of submission: (1) the submission of wives to husbands, (2) the submission of children to parents, and (3) the submission of slaves to masters. This is not to say that the submission is identical in each case. Neither wives nor children are slaves, nor are women to be childlike in their marriages. Each of these relationships is unique. Nevertheless, they have this in common—that each involves submission. And it is for this reason that they occur here, after the topical sentence “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” They are examples of what Paul means when he talks about submission.

Moreover, this is why the pairs are mentioned in the order they are. We do not usually say “children and parents.” We say “parents and children,” putting older, more responsible persons first. Similarly, we say “masters and slaves” rather than “slaves and masters.” In

each case, the order should be reversed in normal presentation. The reasons “wives,” “children,” and “slaves” occur first in these presentations is that the duty Paul chiefly wishes to emphasize is their submission.

So far as marriage is concerned, Paul is saying that the wife is to assume a subordinate role in the home. This is not a matter of a lack of equality. Whether male or female, child or parent, servant or master, all are made in God’s image and are equally valuable to God. Moreover, the subordination involved, particularly that of the wife, is voluntary. No woman need accept the proposal of any man. However, if she does voluntarily accept that proposal and enters into matrimony (and if she is a Christian woman, desiring to be what God declares she is to be), she thereby accepts the headship of her husband over her and promises submission to him. We know that there are thousands of women who rail against this, and there are thousands of men who obviously give them just cause. But a Christian woman will nevertheless desire and seek to live up to God’s standard.

Moreover, this is what wives really want. We hear much to the contrary today, particularly from women’s liberation spokespersons, and we might therefore think that women want to dominate their husbands—and should, if they have the brains and will to do it. But this is the devil’s lie. No good woman (indeed, hardly any woman at all) wants a man she can boss around. She wants a man she can look up to, whose judgment she can respect, and whose leadership she can respond to. If she does not get this in her man, she feels cheated. True, wives are sinners like their husbands. Wives will press their husbands on the question of mastery. They will fight for their own way. But deep inside, what wives really want is a man who will rule them and their home—gently and with love, to be sure—but rule them nevertheless.

According to Paul, the wife is to submit to her husband “as to the Lord.” That is, there is an analogy between the way she submits to Jesus Christ as Lord of her life and the way she submits to her husband as lord of her home. This is because God has made the husband to be head of his wife just as he has made Christ to be head of the church, which is his body.

The Duty of Husbands

But just because the wife is to submit to her husband does not give the husband a right to act like a petty tyrant around the house. In fact, he is not to be a tyrant at all. If the wife’s standard in the marriage is the very high standard of her love for and submission to Jesus Christ, the man’s standard is to be even higher. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. No woman will have much trouble submitting to a man who loves like that. No good woman will struggle hard against a man who is willing to die for her.

In talking about the husband’s duty toward his wife Paul uses five verbs drawn from Christ’s actions toward his bride the church.

1. *Christ “loved” the church* (v. 25). “Love” is Paul’s key word for Christian husbands, just as “submit” is his key word for Christian wives. It is not a verb to be taken lightly. What does love mean? I like Walter Trobisch’s definition: “Let me try to tell you what it really should mean if a fellow says to a girl, ‘I love you.’ It means: You, you, you. You alone. You shall reign in my heart. You are the one whom I have longed for, without you I am incomplete. I will give everything for you, and I will give up everything for you, myself as well as all that I possess. I will love you alone, and I will work for you alone. And I will wait for you. ... I will never force you, not even by words. I want to guard you, protect you and keep you from all evil. I want to share with you all my thoughts, my heart and my body—all that I possess. I want to listen to what you have to say. There is nothing I want to undertake without your blessing. I want to remain always at your side.”

Love like that blesses and makes homes stable. It is learned only at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Do husbands love like that? Do men even understand that this is what true love is? Not many! Yet this is their standard, and they are responsible for knowing it and acting upon it. In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter tells husbands that if they do not love like this, God will not even listen to their prayers. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, *so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*” Why should God listen to a man who does not even know how to treat his wife properly?

2. *Christ “gave himself up” for the church* (v. 25). The full measure of Christ’s love for the church was his dying for her. We are told in one of the Greek histories that the wife of one of the generals of Cyrus, the ruler of Persia, was accused of treachery and was condemned to die. At first her husband did not know what was taking place. But as soon as he heard about it he rushed to the palace and burst into the throne room. He threw himself on the floor before the king and cried out, “Oh, my Lord Cyrus, take my life instead of hers. Let me die in her place.”

Cyrus, who by all historical accounts was a noble and extremely sensitive man, was touched by this offer. He said, “Love like that must not be spoiled by death.” Then he gave the husband and wife back to each other and let the wife go free.

As they walked away happily the husband said to his wife, “Did you notice how kindly the king looked at us when he gave you the pardon?”

The wife replied, “I had no eyes for the king. I saw only the man who was willing to die in my place.”

That is the picture the Holy Spirit paints for us in this great chapter of Ephesians. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, giving himself up for her. In fairness, let me say this to husbands. Most of us will never have a chance to put love to that great and ultimate test, but we do have countless lesser ways to show our love daily. One wife

rightly told her husband, “Dear, I know that you are willing to die for me; you have told me that many times. But while you are waiting to die, could you just fill in some of the time helping me dry the dishes?”

3. *Christ’s goal is “to make [the church] holy” (v. 26).* The word is *hagios*, and it is translated “sanctify” as well as “make holy.” A holy person (or saint) is one who is set apart wholly for God. This is what Jesus desires of his church: that she might be set apart wholly for himself. So also are husbands to love their wives, winning them for themselves. Moreover, since we must think of this in terms of the wives’ relationships to God also, it is winning them for devotion to Jesus. In other words, husbands are to have their wives’ spiritual development in view.

4. *Christ is “cleansing” his church through the word (v. 26).* This verb carries out the spiritual meaning of the verb “sanctify” or “make holy,” and it teaches that God holds husbands responsible for the spiritual growth and maturing of their wives, as well as of their children (cf. Ephesians 6:4).

5. *Christ will “present” the church as a radiant bride without blemish (v. 27).* John Stott calls this the eschatological dimension, that is, the end product, when the church shall appear before God in perfection. “Just so,” he says, “a husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself up for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself.”

I think here of something C. S. Lewis said in one of his writings. He wrote that because we are eternal beings, created with eternal souls, in the ages to come each of us is going to be either some dazzlingly beautiful creature, one that would overwhelm us with awe if we were to see such a creature now, or else an everlasting horror, from which we would all recoil—depending upon our having entered into (or not having entered into) salvation through Jesus Christ. Here is realistic eschatology. And with that in view, I suggest that any husband would be a better husband if he could see his wife as on the way to becoming that dazzling creature, which she will surely be in heaven in her resurrected body, and if he could realize that under God he has a responsible part in her transformation.

Happy Homes

God created marriage in order that, among other things, a Christian man and a Christian woman might find the deepest of all possible fulfillments in each other and be happy. I know there are Christians who will acknowledge this, but who are discouraged by their personal failures and who have concluded that there is now no hope for their marriage. Let me say that for the Christian it is never the case that any given relationship is hopeless. Let me tell you of one marriage resurrection.

Pat Williams, the general manager of the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team, tells in

Rekindled how, like an unattended fire, his marriage had died out. He is a busy, active man. He had been neglecting his wife Jill. She had complained. But nothing really changed, and the day came (as it does with many) when she told him that it was all over. She was not threatening to move out, but she had no love for him anymore. She was only going through the motions. Pat began to search for what he could do, and in his search he came upon a “Prescription for a Superb Marriage” in Ed Wheat’s book *Love Life for Every Married Couple*. It was a simple prescription for what Wheat called the “BEST” of all possible marriages:

B lessing

E difying

S haring

T ouching

“Blessing” means to speak well of your partner, to show kindness toward your partner, to convey thanks and appreciation for your partner, and to pray to God on your partner’s behalf.

“Edifying” mean to build up. Husbands are to build their wives up by praising them. Wives are to build their husbands up by a loving response.

“Sharing” means doing things together—listening, loving, learning, investigating, reporting.

“Touching” refers to nonsexual touching. It is so important in Wheat’s prescription that he lists twenty-five specific suggestions for it.

These four rules are actually only ways of doing what the Bible says we are to do to love one another. But that is just the point. They are practical ways of actually *doing* what the Bible says; and because they are ways of doing what the Bible says, they work. They worked with Pat and Jill. It took time, but their marriage was rekindled. Joy returned. Both grew, and the marriage became a model for many through Pat’s book and their testimony.

Loving husbands, happy wives! The words are indeed often an embarrassment, but this is because of our sin. Embarrassment is a confession of failure. But it is also a challenge to heed the Word of God and put God’s instructions for a happy marriage into practice.

Ephesians 5:32

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

William Barclay is often quite perceptive. This is the case when he points out at the beginning of his treatment of Ephesians 5:22–33 that “no one reading this passage in the twentieth century can fully realize how great it is.” As Barclay notes, through the years the Christian view of marriage has come to be accepted, so that although our Western world obviously fails to live up to God’s standards for marriage we all nevertheless accept them as proper. But when Paul wrote these verses, the Christian view of marriage was new and radical.

A New View of Marriage?

Of the three ancient cultures into which the Christian Scriptures were written—Hebrew, Greek, and Roman—Hebrew culture had the highest ideal of marriage. This was what we might expect because of the continuity between the two covenants, between God’s revelation in the Old Testament and God’s revelation in the New. Nevertheless, at the time of the writing of the New Testament the Bible’s proper ideal of marriage had been undermined and virtually destroyed. At the time of Christ a Jewish woman was not a person but a thing, much as black people were regarded as things (property) in America before emancipation. A woman had no legal rights whatever, and a wife could be dismissed at will.

It is true that the schools of Shammai and Hillel disagreed on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, the chief divorce law in Israel. It said that a man could divorce his wife if he found “something indecent about her” (NIV). Shammai said this meant adultery, and adultery alone. Hillel interpreted it as anything that might displease the husband, even spoiling his dinner. This was a major difference, of course. But since either was a recognized possibility, it is easy to see which view prevailed.

Moreover, a woman had no right of divorce, and a man could divorce simply by giving his wife a “bill of divorcement,” that is, a simple written statement that he had divorced her. The result was that marriage was in peril in Judaism. As Barclay notes, Jewish girls were refusing to marry at all because of their uncertain position.

If the state of marriage was on perilous ground in Judaism, it was on even worse ground in Greek and Roman cultures. Demosthenes had said, “We have courtesans for our pleasure, concubines for daily cohabitation, and wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for our household affairs.” In Greece a married woman had no part in a man’s life. She was not even a true companion to her husband. She was to run his home and care for his children. A Greek husband was expected to find companionship elsewhere.

And what of Rome? Rome was the sewer of the ancient world. For the first five hundred years of the Republic divorce was unheard of. But at the time of Paul, as Seneca said, women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. Martial tells of a woman who had ten husbands. Juvenal tells of one who had eight husbands in five years. Jerome tells of one Roman matron who was married to her twenty-third husband, and she was his twenty-first wife. Sexual perversions were rampant, and profligacy was widespread.

Barclay says, "It was against that background that Paul writes. When Paul wrote this most lovely passage he was not simply restating the view that every man held. He was calling men and women to a new fidelity and a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life. It is the simple fact of history that no one in this world with the single exception of children ... owes more to Christ than women. It is impossible to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity had on ordinary everyday home life in the ancient world."

The True Order

Yet the interesting thing about the discussion of marriage in Ephesians 5:22–33 is that, if you had asked Paul if he thought he was unfolding a newer, higher, and purer view of marriage than had been known before, he would have denied it at once. Barclay says that Paul was "*calling* men and women to a new fidelity and a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life." But Paul, if he could be pressed to acknowledge even this, would have said at best that he was "*re-calling*" them to this standard.

The reason is that Paul was conscious of having gotten his ideas of marriage not from some special, new revelation of God but from the Old Testament, indeed, from the very early chapters of Genesis. In Ephesians 5:31 he quotes an Old Testament text specifically, saying, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." The quotation is from Genesis 2:24. So Paul is saying that his teaching is based on this and other parts of the Old Testament revelation, not on some new revelation or, worse yet, on some insight peculiar to himself or his Christian contemporaries. The true historical order is not a progression from animalistic or merely inadequate views of marriage to higher views. It is rather: first, the high standard; second, a falling away from that standard; third, a recall to that standard through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's view is grounded in the original orders of creation.

In fact, it goes back even further than that. One of my predecessors as pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was Donald Grey Barnhouse, a man who had a remarkable Bible-teaching ministry. Among other things Barnhouse was noted for his gift of sermon illustration. His own explanation of his insight was this. Early in his ministry he read Revelation 13:8 which speaks of Christ having been "slain from [before] the creation of the world." He immediately recognized that if this is so, then in God's mind spiritual things came before all material ones and, as a result, everything was created to illustrate some spiritual truth. It did not make any difference what it was—whether the sun and moon, a blade of grass, a snowflake, a lamb, a horse—whatever—God created it to illustrate

some spiritual truth that existed in God's mind prior to that creation.

This applies to marriage. When God created marriage it was not simply that God considered marriage to be a good idea, though it certainly is that, or even because God thought it would be a good way to have and rear children. God created marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church.

The relationship of a husband to a wife in marriage was going to illustrate the relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ to those he would one day redeem from sin's slavery. The relationship of a wife to her husband was going to illustrate the relationship the people of God, the church, would have to Jesus Christ.

This is why the name of Christ occurs again and again throughout this great passage: "Wives, submit to your husbands as 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 his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, 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" (vv. 22–32).

Which comes first in the mind of God: the relationship of Christ to the church or marriage, which is the illustration of it? Obviously the relationship of Christ to the church! But if this is so, then several important conclusions follow.

1. *No one will ever be able to understand the truest, deepest meaning of marriage who is not a Christian.* If a husband is to love like Christ, he must know the love of Christ in order to fulfill that commandment. If a wife is to submit to her husband as she submits to Christ, she must first have submitted to Christ to understand it.

2. *No one who is a Christian should ever marry a person who is not a Christian.* Second Corinthians 6:14 says that explicitly: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." But even without this text the principle should be evident from the nature of the relationships. If one partner is a Christian and the other is not, a husband and wife cannot possibly have the same ideals for their marriage and the marriage is flawed from the beginning.

3. *No marriage will ever attain its true potential unless those united in the marriage are pursuing it according to God's goal and standards.* In this as in all other areas of life we are to "trust in the LORD with all [our hearts] and lean not on [our] own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). Only when we pursue marriage according to God's standards will God make our paths

straight and bring blessing.

True Union

When Paul writes about Christ and the church he is giving grounds to apply everything about that relationship to everything about the relationship of a man to a woman and a woman to a man in marriage—as the earlier verses in this chapter also suggest. But it is important to note that the point at which Paul actually brings this comparison in is when he is talking about the *union* of two persons in marriage as a result of which they become “one flesh” (v. 31). There are three great mystical unions in the Bible: (1) the union of the three persons of the Godhead, being one God; (2) the union of the two natures of Christ in one person; and (3) the union of the believer with Christ. Marriage illustrates the third of these unions which is why Paul calls it “a profound mystery.” It is not incomprehensible, but it is something that taxes even our sanctified understanding.

One thing this means is that a man and woman are to be united to each other in marriage as they can never be united to anyone else, not even to their closest friends or family. Nor is any other closeness in life comparable.

When God made the first man and the first woman he made them in his own image which means, among other things, that he made them a trinity as he is a trinity. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In a similar way, man is a trinity of body, soul, and spirit. The union of one man with one woman in marriage is to be a union on each of these three levels. It must be if the marriage is to attain to God’s design for it and be lasting.

It must be a union of body with body, first of all, which is to say that there must be a valid sexual relationship. For this reason all branches of the Christian church have acknowledged that a marriage has not actually taken place until the sexual union is consummated. If sexual union does not take place or cannot take place, then the marriage can be annulled as invalid. I tell couples that this is a vital part of marriage. According to the Bible, neither the man nor the woman is to defraud the other of the sexual experience. The quickest way for the marriage to end up in trouble is for the wife to have a headache every night and go to sleep early to avoid sex or for the husband to lose interest in his wife romantically and spend his nights elsewhere. Sex must be a regular expression of the relationship.

On the other hand, if the relationship is based upon nothing but sex—in other words, if it is a marriage of body with body alone and not of soul with soul and spirit with spirit—then the marriage is weak and is headed for the divorce courts. When the glamor wears off, as it always does if there is nothing more to sustain it, the relationship is finished. Such a marriage is based purely on physical attraction and ends in either indifference, divorce, or adultery.

A good marriage is more than a union of body with body. It is also a union of soul with

soul. The word “soul” had almost passed out of use in the English language until the blacks of our day revived it; but it is a good word, and we would have been poorer for its loss. It refers to the intellectual and emotional side of a person’s nature, involving the characteristics that we associate with the mind. Hence, a marriage that involves a union of souls is a marriage in which a couple share an interest in the same things—the same books, the same shows, the same friends—and seek to establish a meeting of the minds (as it were) both intellectually and emotionally. Such marriages will last longer.

I believe that at this point a special word must be said to Christians who are married. For whenever a minister speaks like this to Christians, many are already racing ahead of him to point three and are concluding that because their marriages are one of spirit with spirit, they do not need to worry very much about a union of their minds or souls. This is not right. Not only do we need to worry about it at times, we also need to work toward it. For an emotional and intellectual union does not in itself come naturally.

What does a young woman have in her mind when she marries a young man? What is her vision of this new husband? It may have something to do with her father and whether she liked him or rebelled against him. It has a little bit of Clark Gable mixed up in it, and perhaps a little of James Bond or Johnny Carson or her minister. What is the vision of the husband? Keith Miller, who wrote the best-selling book *The Taste of New Wine*, said that his vision was probably a combination of Saint Teresa, Elizabeth Taylor, and ... Betty Crocker.

What happens when a girl with a vision of Clark Gable and a man with a vision of Betty Crocker get married and begin to find out that the other person is not much like their vision? One of two things! Either they center their minds on the difference between the ideal and what they are increasingly finding the other person to be like and they try, either openly or subversively, to push the spouse into the image. Or by the grace of God they increasingly come to accept the other person as he or she is, including his or her standards of how they themselves should be, and then, under God, seek to conform to the best and most uplifting of those standards.

It must be one or the other of those ways. Keith Miller has written, “The soul of a marriage can be a trysting place where two people can come together quietly from the struggles of the world and feel safe, accepted and loved ... or it can be a battle ground where two egos are locked in a lifelong struggle for supremacy, a battle which is for the most part invisible to the rest of the world.”

If we are to have the former in our marriages, then we must work toward it. We must do it by cultivating the interests and the aspirations of the other party.

A true marriage, then, must be a marriage of body with body and of soul with soul. But it must also be a marriage of spirit with spirit. For this reason the only marriages that can approximate the kind of marriage that God intended to exist in this world are Christian marriages.

What does this mean, a marriage of spirit with spirit? Primarily it means that both the husband and the wife must be Christians, for the unsaved person possesses a spirit only in the sense that he supports a vacuum at the center of his life that can only be filled by God. He has a spirit, but the spirit has died—just as Adam’s spirit died when he disobeyed God and ran from him. The only persons who possess a live spirit are those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit and have entered into God’s family by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only these can be married in the full sense of the word, which means body with body, soul with soul, and spirit with spirit. In this type of union a man and a woman experience the fullest measure of earthly blessing and most fully illustrate the mystical union of Christ and his church.

True and Perfect Love

Yet when we think of Christ and his relationship to the church, we think not primarily of his mystical union with us (important as that is) but of the simpler and even more wonderful fact that he loved us and gave himself for us. We recognize that this is to be our pattern.

In the Old Testament we are told of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer which from the beginning was set forth as an illustration of the way God loves and gives himself for his people in spite of their unfaithful behavior. Gomer was like us. She was married to Hosea, but she was flirtatious and soon left him for another man. Hosea made sure that she had food to eat and clothes to wear—even when she was living with another man. But at last Gomer sank so low that she was sold as a slave in the city of Samaria, and Hosea was told to go and buy her. He bought her for “fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley” (Hosea 3:2). At this point Gomer became Hosea’s property; he could have killed her if he wished. But he did not kill her. *He loved her!* And now, since she was his again, he promised love for her and claimed her love for himself.

This is a picture of the way the Lord Jesus Christ loves us and of how our marriages are to illustrate that great and prior relationship. We are the adulterous slave, sold on the auction block of sin. He loved us when we did *not* love him. He died for us when we were scorning his love and running from him. Still, he bought us by that greatest of all sacrifices, and we became his. Peter says, “You were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18–19). Having become his, we now owe him the fullest measure of love.

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Never make the mistake of dragging your understanding of the love of God in Christ down to the level of your own weak love. Rather let God draw your love up by the love and power of Christ to his standard. Then Christ shall have his way, and you will be able to

testify to the world of his great love.²

(5:25–27) The duty of the wives is to obey their husbands. The duty of the husband is to love his wife. The word for “love” here is agapoō (ἀγαπῶ), referring to the love that God is (I John 4:8), that God showed at Calvary (John 3:16), and the love that the Holy Spirit produces in the heart of the yielded believe (Gal. 5:22). This is a self-sacrificial love, a love that impels the one loving to give himself in self-sacrifice for the well-being of the one who is loved. The husband has three other kinds of love for his wife, a love of passion (erōs (ἐρως)), a love of complacency and satisfaction (stergō (στεργώ)), and a fondness or affection (phileō (φιλεῶ)). All these are saturated with the agapaō (ἀγαπάω) love of the Spirit-filled husband, purified and made heavenly in character.

Expositors comments on the words, “that He might sanctify and cleanse it,” as follows: “Statement of the great object with which Christ in His love for the Church gave Himself up to death for it. An object worthy of the self-sacrifice, described in definite terms and with a solemn significance—the sanctification and cleansing of the Church with a view to its final presentation in perfect holiness at the great day.” “Sanctify” is *hagiazō* (ἁγιάζω), “to set apart for a sacred use.” The distinctive aspect of sanctification here is that of inward ethical purification as in I Thessalonians 5:23. The succeeding context points to this interpretation “Cleanse” is a modal participle, showing how or in what manner the sanctification takes place. The translation so far reads: “In order that it He might sanctify, cleansing it.” This cleansing is accomplished by “the washing of water by the word.” “Washing” is *loutro* (λουτρόν), “a bath.” The words “of water” are genitive of description, describing the bath as one effected by water. “By the word” is *en hrēmati* (ἐν ῥηματι), “in the sphere of the Word.” That is, this inward ethical purification is accomplished by the Word of God having liberty in the heart of the Spirit-filled believer, displacing sin and substituting in its place, righteousness. The blood of Christ cleanses from actual sin, and thus cleanses the believer. The Word cleanses him in the sense above mentioned, water being a type of the Word of God.

The Greek of verse 27 begins as follows: “In order that He might Himself present to Himself the Church glorious.” Expositors comments: “It is Christ Himself who is to present the Church, and it is to *Himself* He is to present it. He is at one the Agent and the End or Object of the presentation.... The idea, as the context suggests, is that of the Bridegroom *presenting* or *setting forth* the bride. The presentation in view, which is given here as the *final* object of Christ’s surrendering of Himself to death, and (by use of the aorist) as a single definite act, cannot be anything done in the world that now is, but must be referred to the future consummation, the event of the Parousia (the Rapture).” The words. “not having spot or wrinkle,” are an explanation on the negative side of what is meant in the

² Boice, J. M. (1988). *Ephesians: an expositional commentary* (pp. 190–216). Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library.

word “glorious.” The bride is to be without moral blemish.

“Holy” is *hagia* (ἅ γ ι α), “separate from evil”; “without blemish,” *amōmos* (ἀμωμοϛ), “faultless, unblamable,” namely, free from faultiness, as a sacrificial animal without blemish.

Translation. The husbands, be loving your wives in the manner in which Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself on behalf of it, in order that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the bath of water in the sphere of the Word, in order that He might Himself present to Himself the Church glorious, not having spot nor wrinkle nor any of such things, but in order that it might be holy and unblamable.

(5:28–30) Expositors’ comment on verse 28 is as follows: “The idea, therefore, is that even as Christ loved the Church, so too ought husbands to love their wives,—as their own bodies. This is not to be reduced to ‘like themselves’: nor does hōs (ὡϛ) (as) here mean simply ‘like,’ as if all that is meant is that the husband’s love for his wife is to be similar to his love for his own body. The hōs (ὡϛ) (as) has its qualitative force, ‘as it were,’ ‘as being.’ Christ and husband are each head, as Paul has already put it, and as the Church is the body in relation to the former, so is the wife in relation to the latter. The husband, the head, therefore, is to love the wife as being his body, even as Christ loved the Church as forming His body. The idea of husband and wife as being one flesh is probably also in view. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself. The relation of head and body means that the wife is part of the husband’s self. To love his wife, therefore, in this character as being his body, is to love himself. It is a love consequently, not merely of duty,—but of nature.”

The same authority continues on verse 29. “The ‘for’ gives a reason for the preceding statement, looking to the *thought*, however, rather than to the *form* of the statement. The *thought* is the oneness of husband and wife, the position of the wife as part of the husband’s self; and the connection is this; ‘he should love her even as Christ loved the Church, for the wife, I say, is as the body in that natural relationship in which the husband is the head, so that in loving her he loves himself; and this is the reason in *nature* why he should love her, for according to this, to hate his wife is to hate his own flesh, which is contrary to nature and a thing never seen.’ ‘Flesh’ here has its non-ethical sense, practically, *body*.”

In verse 30, the Greek order is, “Because members we are of His body.” The word “members” has the emphatic position. Expositors says: “We are not something apart from Christ, nor do we occupy only an incidental relation to Him. We are veritable parts of that body of which He is Head, and this is the reason why He nourishes and cherishes the Church.” The words, “of His flesh and of His bones” are a rejected reading by Nestle and also Westcott and Hort.

Translation. In this manner ought also the husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. The one who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one

ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Christ, the Church, because members are we of His body.

(5:31) "Leave" is kataleipō (καταλείπω), "to leave behind, depart from." "Joined" is proskollō (προκόλλω), "to glue upon, to glue to, to join one's self to closely, cleave to, stick to." The compound verb denotes a most intimate union. "Shall be one flesh" does not include the preposition eis (εἰς) in the Greek text, which the A.V., does not translate. The full rendering is, "shall be unto one flesh." The Revision has "shall become one flesh."

Translation. Because of this a man shall leave behind his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

(5:32, 33) The word "great" is in the predicate, not the attributive position. It is, "This mystery is great." Vincent says; "The reference in this mystery is to the preceding statement of the conjugal relation of the Church with Christ, typified by the human marriage relation." The same authority translates, "In regard of Christ and the Church," and says: "Not calling your attention to the mere human relationship, but to the mysterious relation between Christ and His Church, of which that is a mere semblance."

Commenting on the words: "Let each one of you love his own wife as himself," Expositors says: "The 'each one' expresses still more emphatically the absoluteness and universality of the Christian duty of conjugal love—a duty from which no single husband is exempt. As in verse 28, the *hōs* (ὡς) (as) means not merely that each husband is to love his wife as he loves himself, but that he is to love her as *being* herself part and parcel of himself according to the divine idea of the marriage union."

The word "reverence" is *phobeō* (φοβέω), "to fear, to be afraid of, to reverence, to venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience." Expositors defines: "fear in the sense of *reverence*, spontaneous, obedient regard."

Translation. This mystery is great. However, I am speaking with regard to Christ and the Church. Nevertheless also as for you, let each one in this manner be loving his own wife as himself, and the wife, let her be continually treating her husband with deference and reverential obedience.³

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Eph 5:21–6:4). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.