

MARRIAGE: A PICTURE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:22-33

Introduction:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church..." Whenever I come to the topic of marriage I get a bit nervous. Explain – my wife is sitting there listening, probably wondering why I don't practice what I preach...

So, I thought I would start with a few humorous stories to lighten things up a bit.

BEAUTIFUL AND STUPID AT THE SAME TIME

A husband and wife were having an argument. Finally, out of sheer frustration, the husband blurted out, "Honey, I don't know why God made you so beautiful...and, yet, so stupid, at the same time!"

The woman stared at her husband and said, "Wellllllllllll...God made me BEAUTIFUL so you could love me. And God made me STUPID so I could love you!"

The story is told of a little boy sitting on his front steps with his face cradled in his hands, looking so forlorn. His dad came home just then & asked him what was wrong. The little boy looked up & said, "Well, just between us, Dad, I'm having trouble getting along with your wife, too!"

A cynic once observed: All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble.

Marriage is the very first institution established by God. When God created the first man, Adam, he placed him in the garden to tend and care for it. But something was very obvious. Let's go back to Genesis for a moment.

Go through Gen. 2:18-25, briefly:

- It was not good for the man to be alone
- There was no helper among the animals fit for him – comparable to him
- God took a part of the man and from it created the first woman, a helper comparable to him
- The sacredness of the marriage relationship was established

Now back to Ephesians 5. This is a continuation of the passage we looked at a few weeks ago. Chapter 5 begins with the instruction that we are to be imitators of Christ. We looked at what that meant in verses 3-21:

- It means living pure lives, untainted by the evil of the world – vv. 3-7
- It means living transparent lives, lives exposed by the light of Jesus Christ – vv. 8-14
- It means living Spirit-filled lives, being careful how we conduct ourselves – vv. 15-20

He concludes that section with a reminder of humility – "...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (v. 21) With that statement he moves into another realm, that of submission and headship. He begins, in v. 22, to give instruction concerning marriage and the relationship between husband and wife. That, in itself, is interesting as there is no indication in Scripture that the Apostle Paul was ever married himself. But there is something else I want you to see in this passage that Paul is wanting to get across to his readers.

Look at vv. 31-32. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, regarding the bond of marriage. Then he goes on to point out an important truth regarding the marriage relationship. Marriage was designed to be a picture of Christ and his relationship to the church.

There are four areas I want to look at this morning in connection to the relationship of Christ and his church. Then we will conclude by looking at how this all applies to the marriage relationship. The four areas are:

- The Headship of Christ over His Church
- The Sacrifice of Christ for His Church
- The Purpose of Christ for His Church
- The Union of Christ with His Church

The Headship of Christ Over His Church

Paul begins with the concept of headship and submission – *read vv. 22-24*. How exactly is the headship of Christ reflected toward the

church. There is a clear connection salvation, as he refers to Christ as the Saviour of the body. But there are a number of elements of headship which can be seen in different passages of Scripture. I want to mention a few of these. (*Thanks to Robert Deffinbaugh for his presentation of these ideas*)

(1) Christ is the head of His church as its Creator. Headship has to do with origins. Christ is the Head of the church because He has brought it into existence; the church originates in Christ (Colossians 1:16-18).

Adam was the head of his wife because she came forth from him (1 Corinthians 11:8 - *For man did not come from woman, but woman from man*).

(2) Christ is the head of His church as its Sustainer. Headship involves sustenance, and Christ is the Sustainer of the church (Colossians 1:17; see also Ephesians 4:15-16).

(3) Christ is the head of His church as its Consummation. All of history is being divinely directed toward the goal of coming “together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10).

(4) Christ is the Head of His church by having authority over it. Headship involves authority. To be the “head” of a company is to be in charge of it. To be the head of the church is to be in authority over it (Ephesians 1:22).

(5) Christ is the Head of His church because He is the One who is to be pre-eminent and to receive the glory. Christ is to be the object of our worship, adoration, and praise. He is to be lifted up and exalted. He is to have the pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18).

Several of the elements of Christ’s headship are drawn together by Paul in Romans, where he writes, “For from Him [origin] and through Him [sustaining] and to Him [consummation] are all things. To Him be the glory [pre-eminence, praise], forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

So in the declaration of Paul that “the husband is the head of the wife,” we see a symbolism which is really intended to picture the reality of Christ’s headship over the church. And with that comes the church’s submission to Him, with the expectation that the wife would also submit to her husband – see verse 24.

The Sacrifice of Christ for the Church

Let’s move on to vv. 25-27 - *read them*. In these verses we see the sacrifice of Christ for the church. You see, the other side of headship is sacrifice. When God calls a wife to submit to the headship of her husband, he offers the picture the submission of the church to Christ as the example to follow. Now when he calls a husband to love his wife, he offers the picture of Christ’s love and sacrifice for his church as the perfect example.

On the night before Jesus was arrested and crucified, he spoke to his disciples in a lengthy discourse that is recorded by John. He spoke to them about the coming Holy Spirit. He spoke about their relationship with him. And he spoke to them about the importance of love in their relationships with others. He said, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:12-13)

The Apostle Paul took that further in Romans 5, when he reminded us that Christ died for us. *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Ro 5:6-8 ESV)

Now in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul again links the ideas of love and sacrifice – *“...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* Why? *“...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...”*

In John 15, again in that final discourse of Jesus, he said to his disciples, *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”* (John 15:3) His desire is to see his church pure, cleansed from all hint of sin or impurity.

That leads us into the next point...

The Purpose of Christ for His Church

Read v. 27 – There we see what Christ is seeking to accomplish in what he has done for his church. He is preparing the church for himself

and he wants her to be pure, without spot or wrinkle or any kind of blemish. Why is this so important? He is preparing the church as a bride for himself. And he is looking for a spotless bride.

Christ loves the church and he has done everything for the church, even to the point of giving himself up for her, so that she can be perfect, complete and pure when the time come for the wedding ceremony.

Then comes the call, men, for us as husbands to love our wives in that same way. Christ's desire is for what is good and right and best for his bride, the church. We are to love in the same way. That is really what true love is – a desire for what is best for the other person.

The Union of Christ with His Church

(Thanks to Robert Deffinbaugh for his thoughts on this)

The relationship between Christ and His church is a mystery, Paul tells us, a great mystery. A fundamental element of the mystery is the union between Christ and His church.

Think about this. In the Old Testament time, men had to keep their distance from God. They could not approach Mount Sinai when God was giving the Law (Exodus 19:12-13, 21, 24). The people could only approach God through the shedding of the blood, and both in the Tabernacle and the Temple there were barriers established between God and men. Even the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies but once a year.

People could not even dream of the intimacy which God had in mind for His people. Jesus would come to the earth to “tabernacle” among men (John 1:14). He would take on human flesh, so that men not only saw God revealed in the flesh, but they touched Him, and felt His healing touch. And when Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, the veil which formerly separated men from God was torn in two, from top to bottom. The Lord Jesus became the means of an intimacy with God the Old Testament saints could hardly imagine. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

This intimacy was even more than that of being with Him; it was that of being one with Him, of being **“in Christ”** and Christ in us. In verse 31 Paul cites Genesis 2:24, and immediately informs us that this text refers to Christ and His church. How can this be? Because marriage, from

its beginnings, was designed by God to symbolize the relationship of Christ to the church.

We talked about this earlier, how Adam was the only creature without a corresponding mate. God created the woman as Adam's helpmeet, fashioning her to correspond to him in every way. God then brought the woman to Adam, and presented her to him as his wife. Adam joyfully responded, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). As creation's first husband and wife, Adam and Eve symbolized by their marriage the unity of Christ and His church which would be achieved at the cross of Calvary, centuries later.

Conclusion

Well, we need to wrap this up. How does this apply to us today? Our world has so distorted the ideal of marriage and twisted the concepts of headship and submission that it is easy to miss the point of all this. God has given us the privilege in our marriages to portray a marvelous heavenly truth – that Christ is preparing a bride for himself and loves her with a pure and sacrificial love.

When I look at the love of Christ for his church, and what he has done for her, why would not the body of Christ respond by willingly submitting to the headship of one who loved her enough to give himself up for her? In the same way, if a husband is willing to love with that same sacrificial love, willingly giving himself up for his wife, why would she not willingly respond to that by submitting to his headship?

Certainly the world sees things differently. They would see Paul's teaching here as narrow and chauvinistic. But in reality God has used Paul to show us a better way. The way of Christ will not be in harmony with the thinking of the world.

As Deffinbaugh says – Quote: *“Let us expect reaction to Paul's teachings. But let us not adopt the thinking of the world in which we live toward these matters. Let us rather obey God's commands and fulfill our duty to portray heavenly truths.”*