

Sermon: The Mystery of Christ & His Church
Ephesians 5:28-33

Our study this *morning/evening* is on Ephesians 5:28-33.
This portion of scripture closes out Paul's teaching on marriage.
And in section, we will deal with the mystery of marriage.

We have been focusing on marriage for the last 4 weeks and
my focus has admittedly been more theological and less
practical.

Now, there are all sorts of practical things that can be said
about marriage.
All kinds of helps and advices that can be given.
And certainly those are needful.
Yet what is most needful for all of us is that we have the right
conception of marriage.
We need to think about it rightly.

God has chosen the relationship of marriage to most deeply
define his relationship to us.
We see this in the beginning with Adam and Eve, how marriage
was the first human relationship.
We see throughout the prophets how God refers to his people
as his wife- and an unfaithful wife at that.
And finally in Revelation, to close out the scriptures, God uses
marriage to describe his intimacy with us.
We are not just the children of God. We are not just the
subjects of King Jesus.
We are not just the citizens of heaven.
We are, most intimately the bride of Christ.

And God has given to humanity the relationship of marriage to
mirror that most intimate and glorious relationship.
God has instituted marriage between a man and a woman to
shed light on his relationship with us.
And so the deepest purpose of marriage is to teach us about
God.
The deepest purpose of marriage is to communicate the gospel.

Nowhere do we see this more clearly articulated than in
Ephesians 5:28-33.
So, let us read God's word from Ephesians 5, beginning at the
25th verse.

Paul Writes:
Ephesians 5:25 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.

Say: This is God's word.
**The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our
God stands forever.**

Who is God?
There are all sorts of ways that we could describe God from
Scripture.
We could name his attributes- his power, his eternality, his
graciousness and love.
We could describe him by his works. He is the creator, our
deliverer, and our sustainer.
We could describe him by his relationship to us.
The Lord is our shepherd, our friend.

Christ is our brother. We are the children of the
heavenly Father.

Yet who is God to you?
You know, I think of my daughter Anna, and how she would
describe me.
I think if she could sum everything up about me, she would say,
He is my daddy who loves me.

The closest relationships are easily summed up.
And John does this in his first epistle.
He writes:

1 John 4:8 Anyone who does not love does not know
God, because God is love.

John is no sentimentalist.
He doesn't have an uninformed view of God.
If you read his Gospel, his letters or the book of Revelation,
then you know that John's knowledge of God is deep.
And so it really ought to astound us that the apostle would sum
God up in this way.

God is love.

Sure, he has all sorts of other attributes.
But if you press John and ask him, who is God most essentially
to you?

Is he the one who is worthy of all praise?
Is he your heavenly king?
Is he your creator, redeemer and friend?

And I believe that John would say, "Yes of course he is all those
things.

But to me, he is love. Because he loves me."
But John, aren't you leaving a lot out? Aren't you being a bit
reductionistic.

And I believe John would answer, "What could matter more
than God's great love for me?"

It's as though every other attribute of God pales in comparison
to this attribute that John most prizes.

God is love.
And all of his ways towards his people are love.
And not just any love.

Not just brotherly love or the love between family or friends.
God loves his people the way the best husband loves his wife-
except incomparably more.

We are the bride of Christ.
The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, took on human
flesh not just to save his church but also so that he could marry
her.

And so when we as believers are asked who God is, we, like
John, should answer from the heart: "To me, God is love."

'Tis mystery all. That God would so love his people.
And so as we study this passage on husbands and wives, we
need to recognize what stands at the center.
The love of Christ takes center stage in this passage.

You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

I. The Counter-Cultural-ness of Christian Marriage

In every generation, Christian marriage has been counter-
cultural.
And yet, depending on the generation, the reasons have been
different.

If you were to just take a poll of people in our cultures about
how Christian marriage is counter-cultural, most I believe
would say that Ephesians 5:22 is the most jarring difference.
Ephesians 5:22 says:

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands,
as to the Lord.

And this verse is not just counter-cultural.
For many, it is downright unpalatable.

It is a non-starter for defining roles and responsibilities in marriage.

Such is the view of our culture today.
Yet this has not always been the case.

When the Christian teaching on marriage was proclaimed to people in the first century, the most counter-cultural tenant was in verse 25:

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

You see, in most cultures, for most of world history, marriage was an arrangement meant to enrich all involved. Families would seek out profitable spouses for their children in order to enrich their status, wealth and security. I've been quoting musicians recently and I'll do so again. In generations past, families looking for spouses for their children would have asked the same question Tina Turner asked: "What's love got to do, got to do with it?
What's love but a second-hand emotion?"

It seems too trite to be true but Tina is right. In previous generations, love was not the foundation of marriage. Increasing status, wealth and security was.

And so, if love developed in a marriage, well then great. But what was most important was status, wealth and security. And this led to women being treated as servants and property in marriage. Even to this day, where the gospel is not, little girls are seen as less valuable than little boys because they are not as useful in establishing generational wealth, power and security. Such has been the case for most of world history.

Yet when the Gospel of Jesus breaks into a culture, the foundation of marriage changes. While marriages may still be arranged, the role and responsibility of the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church.

He is to make her joy and security his top priority. From his perspective, she is to be the more important party in the marriage relationship.

And so, for most of world history, the really counter-cultural part of Ephesians 5 has been that husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This would have been the really hard pill for many to swallow.

Yet in viewing the situation today, there is a cultural victory here. The biblical teaching on marriage has so influenced our cultures today that most would have no problem viewing love as the most basic foundation of a marriage. Though there may still be some argument that the husband's love for his wife takes the priority, most would agree that Love should be the bedrock.

And so I ask you, what is part of Ephesians 5:22-33 do you find most unpalatable? If we desire our thinking be more a product of God's word and less a product of this age, then we have to recognize our cultural blind-spots and prejudices.

The Bible's teaching on marriage is counter-cultural in every generation.

Yet the teaching is more than just counter-cultural. It is certifiably other worldly. And this leads us to our next point which is...
II. The Mystery of "One Flesh"

In verse 28, Paul writes:

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

This shows us that marriage is not just a contract between parties or a relationship between lovers.

It is much more profound and intimate than that.

The marriage union forms a new identity.

No longer is a husband simply a man contractually obligated to his wife. And no longer is he just a man in love with his beloved.

In marriage, two become one.

There is a union that occurs where each is inseparable yet distinct from the other.

Marriage does not cause a person to lose their individuality. Yet it does change the way the individual is viewed.

The husband belongs to his wife and the wife belongs to her husband.

It's not wrong for a woman to refer to her husband as "my man" because, before God, he really does belong to her.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:4:

4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Each partner belongs to the other in marriage and we will work out some of the practical implications of this in just a moment. Yet for now, I want us to recognize the most amazing spiritual implications.

In Ephesians 5:32, Paul writes:

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

Now we have to ask ourselves, at what point in this text did Paul stop referring primarily to human marriage and start referring primarily to Christ and the church? And I am going to say that he changed his primary focus somewhere around verse 29.

In Verse 29, Paul says:

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.

I wonder if any of us has really begun to grasp the staggering import of what Paul says in verse 31?

31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Paul is not talking here primarily about marriage. He is primarily talking about Christ and the church.

Verse 31 of course is a reference to Genesis 2:24.

And it refers to the marriage of Adam to Eve.

God made them for one another and they were perfectly compatible.

She was big where he was small and he was big where she was small.

They were a perfect compliment to one another in strength, psychology, spirit and body.

They fit together perfectly in every way so that when they were together, they made one perfect whole.

Now this union is beautiful, intimate, elegant, useful, and mysterious beyond words.

How could two people be so perfectly matched for one another that they could be considered "one flesh?" They are not simply best friends.

They are not simply soul-mates.
They are one flesh.

For God to use this union as his primary analogy to describe Christ's relationship to his church is just stunning.

It tells us so much about Christ's love for his people.
Consider the incarnation, where God the son chose to take on human flesh and come to earth.
God the Son became a man **in order to pursue and eventually marry his bride.**
As Charles Wesley wrote: "He left his Father's throne above, so free so infinite his grace..."

And this matches well with what Moses wrote in Genesis 2:24:
"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother..."

Christ departed from his Father's side in order to come to earth and seek a wife.
And while we may think this astounding, his incarnation was just the beginning.
His wife had to be brought along in her understanding.
And so Jesus taught the crowds and especially his disciples so that his bride would be prepared in her mind and heart.

And then, at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus did the unthinkable.
He departed from his Father's good graces as he took upon himself the punishment that was due his bride for her sins.
On the cross, Jesus cried out: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Never has a son departed from his family of origin so completely as Christ did upon the cross.
Instead of receiving the infinite praise from the father that he loved and was accustomed to for his entire existence from eternity past,
Instead of that praise, he received absolute condemnation.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother..."
These words are not ultimately about human marriage.
They are ultimately about the Gospel.
Christ left his Father's side because he had to if he was ever to be wedded to his bride.

On the cross, Christ paid for his wife's sins so that he could take her to himself in marriage at his resurrection.

Ephesians 2:6 God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places.

Our union with Christ happened first at the resurrection.
And while we await that great wedding reception which is spoken of in Revelation 19, we need to know that in this moment, if we are in Christ, we are already his bride.
We are already united to him as a wife to a husband.
He is in us and we are in him.

To quote Isaiah 54:5 For your Maker is your husband

And so as Christians, we know that there is nothing that our savior would not do for us.
He lost his wealth, his status and his security because he loved us.
And because he had the power of an indestructible life, he gained it all back and more.

Christ is not the king he was before he left heaven.
Now he is a risen king who has taken his bride to himself.

In Romans 8:32, Paul writes:
Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

And by virtue of our marriage to Jesus, we have all the wealth, status and security that God could possibly lavish upon us.

Christ married us for love and love is at the foundation of his union to us.
He didn't marry us to increase his status, wealth and security. For he lost all of those things.
Christ married us because he loved us and wanted to provide us with the highest status, incomparable wealth and the greatest security.
Regarding status: We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. He gave us riches that will never wear out and when it comes to security, you can't do any better than eternal life.

Christ's love for us accomplished all these things for us.
And all of it is to the praise of God's glorious grace.

We are united to Christ in marriage.
We are one flesh with him.

And so he is our life.
In Colossians 3:3 & 4, Paul writes:
3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Our life is so bound up with Christ that he is our life.
But the union also extends to our mission in life.
We are HIS body called into HIS service to be about HIS mission.
Remember when Paul was persecuting the Church in Acts 9 and Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus?
What were Jesus' first words to him?
Acts 9:4 ... Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Christ is our life. We are his body. And his mission is our mission.

And so, when scripture speaks of being filled with the Spirit, as it does in Ephesians 5:18, God is not simply telling to be influenced by the Spirit.
He's telling us be filled with Jesus Christ.
Because Christ is in us and we are in him.

His love for us could be no greater.
And our intimacy with him could be no more complete this side of heaven.

And so, what should we do with such knowledge?
Well, the first thing I think we should do is just let that sink in.

Every morning, when you wake up, you should make it a point to just thank God for his grace to you.
You are wedded to him.
You are united to him. He is in you and you are in him.
His grace could be no greater and his bod to you is indestructible.

This grace defines our relationship.

When I was in college we had this thing called the DTR.
And the DTR was the talk that couples would have as they found themselves becoming romantically interested in one another.
DTR stands for Defining the Relationship.

And so every morning we need to have a DTR with God.
We have to allow him to Define the Relationship every morning.
Our relationship with God is not contingent upon our performance from the day before, our good behavior in the day ahead, or how faithfully we execute the tasks he has for us.

Our relationship is defined by Christ's cross and resurrection.

It's defined by his union with us.
Christ has asked for our hand in marriage, not because we were so lovely and worthy, but because of the loveliness of his own heart.

So does Christ's union with you define your relationship to him?
Is this true in your heart?
And do you want to give your life to him now in response?

Marriage is ultimately about the Gospel.
We are one flesh with Christ.
And as our lives are transformed by his love for us, we will find ourselves more able to be the people he calls us to be.

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.
So says your savior to you.

Now, finally, we come to our third and final point...

III. The Practical Implications

In verse 31, Paul writes:
31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Now as we have said, this refers primarily to Christ and the church.
Yet it also holds true in marriage.

Because the husband and wife have left their families of origin and are one flesh, they should operate as a new family.

And this means that the influence of their families of origin need to be demoted behind the influence of both the husband and the wife in their new family.

This is such an important point and it is often overlooked or not taken seriously enough.
Both the man and the woman are called to **leave** and **cleave**.
To **cleave** means to stick fast to or hold fast to.

On Friday night I read one final sermon of Martin Lloyd-Jones on this text and I was surprised at how much he saw this as a problem in the marriages of his day.
This failure to leave and cleave.
Many marriages suffer under the burden of parents exercising undue influence on their adult married children.
It's a temptation for parents and children in every generation.

And so it is necessary for both the husband and the wife to recognize that they are, before God, a new household.

Therefore, this new household should seek to be free from the unhealthy influences of parents.
This includes unhealthy financial influences,
unhealthy relational influence
unhealthy psychological influences.

This is such a big deal.

The scripture says:

31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

I wonder how many of the conflicts among married couples in the church today arise because one or both parties have allowed parents, or friends or other family members to meddle in the decision making processes of the new family?

One of the secrets that Ephesians 5 tells us is that what a wife most needs is **love**.
Yet how loving is it when a husband listens to his father or mother more than his wife?

And what a husband desires most is his wife's respect.

Yet how respectful is it when a wife respects the judgments and opinions of her parents or friends more than she respects her husband's?

Jesus said in Matthew 19:6 in reference to marriage:

Matthew 19:6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

This verse applies not only to wrongful divorce.
It also applies to every marriage where there are micro-breaches occurring because of outside influences.

So let me ask you, do you have meddling influences in your marriage?
Do you have parents that are exercising undue psychological, financial or relational influence in the marriage?
If so, I would urge you to examine them and address them head on.

God created married couples to love and respect one another above all others.

This is the dynamic of our spiritual relationship with God and it is to be the rule in our earthly marriages.

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.

Amen.