

“The *Eternal* Value of the *Lifelong* Covenant”
Series: Marriage – What’s the Point? – Part 2
Ephesians 5

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 5, Ephesians chapter 5.

Let’s just say that one day your family decided to get a pet, and after much deliberation you decided a cat would be best. After finding the cutest cat at the animal shelter your family comes home with a wonderful new pet. Pretty soon you learn that this cat needs to know how to have its needs met. It needs food and it needs water and it needs a warm place to sleep and it needs a place to do its business. And so you provide those things. You also discover that the cat needs to know when those needs will be met. So, it will be very interested when you decide to feed it. It might even learn your pattern and start to anticipate when you will feed it. You also discover that the cat needs to know what it can and can’t do in the house, and so you train it to do its business in the kitty litter and not on the carpet. But, let’s say one day you are getting the cat’s food together and the cat is sitting there on the counter watching your every move, when out of the blue the cat says – “why do you mix the soft cat food with the hard cat food in the same bowl?” Now – if any animal might do something like this, it would be a cat because cats seem to have a mind of their own – but they are never interested in the why’s of life.

Now, as humans we are so much different, and one of the fundamental differences between us and cats – or any other part of God’s creation – is this question – Why? We are always asking and answering why questions about everything. We want to know why beef costs so much. We want to know why the car isn’t running right. Why kids always have to make messes and never clean up after themselves? Why one kind of music is appealing while another is appalling? Why your spouse doesn’t squeeze the toothpaste tube the same way you do? Why relationships are so complicated? Why your friend hasn’t called or texted in a while? Why some Bible texts are difficult to understand? We want to know why we are here in this life. We want to know why we are facing this intense trial. We are meaning makers. We want to know the meaning of everything. We spend so much of our mental energy on trying to figure out the why. And that question helps us in so many ways. So, this morning we will seek to answer this question as it relates to marriage. Why has God given us marriage? Why did He design it the way He did? What is its purpose?

These types of questions are important and helpful in lots of categories, but especially as we come to marriage.

- Understanding why God designed and decreed marriage will help us to be faithful to that very plan because with greater understanding comes greater opportunity to obey.
- Understanding why God designed and decreed marriage will also help us be rightly motivated to operate biblically within marriage because we will understand what is at stake. In other words, when I see the divine purpose for marriage my actions are now raised to an eternal rather than merely a temporal level.
- Understanding why God designed and decreed marriage will also help to persuade us that God’s way is best as we see the overarching beauty of His plan.

And so, those form the three goals of this sermon. I long for all of us – married and unmarried alike – to be more faithful to God’s plan for marriage; be motivated to biblical action in and towards marriage; and be persuaded that God’s design is best – and I hope to accomplish those goals by seeing in the text of Scripture the glorious beauty of God’s overarching plan for marriage. In other words – how does God view marriage and how should this inform and help and change us? Why has he given us marriage?

I think it would be helpful before we go there to first understand some common perceptions held by most people about marriage. So, if you did interviews on the street, or even after church today in the lobby, and asked people the question – why marriage? – they would probably say something like this:

- Well, marriage is for happiness I suppose. It's where you find true love and happiness. I mean, aren't we all supposed to live happily ever after?
- Or you might hear – well, I'm not quite sure, but I guess marriage is for fulfillment of desires and partnership. It's where one person completes another and they both make life much more interesting together – you know – someone to share life with.

These answers would be reflective of the recent shift in our culture's overall view of marriage. And so, Tim Keller explains it this way in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*:

“Older cultures taught their members to find meaning in duty, by embracing their assigned social roles and carrying them out faithfully. During the Enlightenment, things began to shift. The meaning of life came to be seen as the fruit of the freedom of the individual to choose the life that most fulfills him or her personally. Instead of finding meaning through self-denial, through giving up one's freedoms, and binding oneself to the duties of marriage and family, marriage was redefined as finding emotional and sexual fulfillment and self-actualization. . . . In this view, married persons married for themselves, not to fulfill responsibilities to God or society.” (Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, pg. 21)

In other words, the purpose of marriage in our Western society has now become all about the individual. It is for their personal fulfillment, their personal identity, their personal satisfaction and desire. And this shift has produced fruit in how we act towards marriage in our society. So, you can work your way backwards to this conclusion by looking at how we act in and towards marriage in our society and see that it really has become all about the individual.

- People in our society get married in this glitzy ceremony and get caught up in the emotions that surround romantic love and when married life doesn't prove to be one emotional high after another they think they have made a mistake and begin to look for the easiest way out.
- People shack up together to test the waters before they commit to marriage. They want to make sure that this girlfriend can really bring the satisfaction and completion that they are looking for. Which, on a side note, only serves to create a false environment because both live-ins are constantly on guard and on their best behavior because they don't want the other to leave. If they ever do decide to get married the bond is typically and quickly broken through divorce when one of them realizes that the person they married is not the same person they were living with. Truth be told they aren't the same person either!
- We also see people engaging in marriage that can look like anything they want it to – from man to man, to woman to woman, or one man to 3 or 4 women, or 3 women all together in one supposed marriage.
- People are also shirking marriage altogether and simply staying single while engaging in all kinds of sexual experiences and experiments.

You see, by looking at how we treat marriage in our culture, it quickly becomes obvious that as a society we see the purpose of marriage being all about the individual. It has become whatever you want it to be to meet whatever need, or tickle whatever fancy you want it to. It is all about you.

But what does the Scripture say about marriage, and how does that inform how we should live within marriage? Well as we turn our thoughts to the Scriptures I want to paint the broad brush for you of what Scripture says as a whole, and then I want to zoom in on the key passage that addresses the heart of why God designed and decreed marriage.

We saw in our first sermon on this series that marriage was God's design and his doing and his decree. On the sixth day of his creation he addressed the glaring need of Adam being alone while all the rest of the animals had

male and female units. You remember how we saw that God purposefully delayed the creation of Eve to make the point to Adam and to everyone who has ever lived that marriage was God's idea and design and that this relationship between the man and the woman in marriage held a special place in God's wonderful plan. You also remember how we saw that God did not simply create marriage, but he also declared that this was to be the pattern – one man joined with one woman for one life. Now, it doesn't take long for mankind to start tinkering with God's good design. Within 6 generations of Adam and Eve one of their descendants, Lamech, takes two wives for himself and directly rebels against the decree of God. This pattern of polygamy, and other manifestations of sinful behavior towards and in marriage dot the landscape of the Old Testament. As Jesus enters the scene early in the 1st Century, the Jewish people continue to practice marriage, but with many of these sinful patterns seen throughout their history still being practiced. And then at one particularly defining moment in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Jewish leaders approach him to test him about a common cultural practice – divorce. In fact, it was so common among the Jews of the First Century that many of the rabbis of the day taught that a man could divorce his wife for virtually any reason – from infidelity to burning the toast. And so, in front of a crowd of people these Jewish leaders test to see how Jesus will answer the question of whether or not it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. And his response as recorded in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 is this – “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mt. 19:5-6)

Do you see what Jesus did here? In a day when marriage had been marginalized and had fallen on as hard of times as it arguably has today, Jesus' answer quotes from the Creation narrative of Genesis 2 and then expands on that to say that marriage is God's doing and it is not to be touched! And then, after Jesus' ministry was done and his ascension was complete and the Church was being birthed through the ministry of the Apostles, we hear again about marriage from several of these apostles inspired by the Spirit to address one of the most crucial relationships in all of life. And so, the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 addresses the marriage relationship in verses 22-33, and as he does, he quotes Genesis 2:24 as the grounds for his statements about marriage. I say this to you to make known that God's decree in Genesis 2:24 was not tied to some cultural phenomenon or some narrative agenda that was only pertinent in Genesis 2. No, God's decree is obviously a universal decree by the very fact that Jesus quotes this decree to combat the false views of marriage of his day, and Paul, under direction of the Spirit quotes Genesis 2 to show us the eternal purpose of marriage. You see, this is obviously how God wants it to work. One man is to leave his father and mother and he is to hold fast to his wife and they are to become one flesh for life. So the decree is universal, but now the question is why? Why does it matter if marriage always looks the same in every culture and in every time? Why is God concerned with this? And for that answer we hone our attention in on Ephesians 5.

Before we read this text, let me say that the book of Ephesians is all about the glory of God as seen in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What the Gospel is and what the Gospel does puts on a display of God in this world that makes known His multi-faceted glory. And so, by the time we get to chapter 5 of the book the argument is focusing in on practical, real-life issues in which we as followers of Christ need to be concerned as we seek to live out the fruit of the Gospel. And so, as Paul spends time exhorting us about our relationships in the home, his focus is still on the work of the Gospel in the context of real life. In other words, he is saying, since all of chapters 1-4 are true, this is how the marriage relationship should look. Because Jesus has done what He has done to save us and because we have been redeemed by Him and united with one another in the Church to display His manifold wisdom, then this is how relationships in the home should look. And so he says to the wife in verse 22 – *Read vs. 22-33.*

To help us understand the why of marriage I want to point out some key observations about the text:

I. An Inseparable Link

- a. Did you notice the inseparable link that exists between marriage and Christ and the Church? This passage cannot mention the marriage relationship without pointing us to the relationship between Christ and the Church. So wives are told to submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord, and then the very next words point us to Christ and the Church. In other words, the reason wives are to submit to their own husbands is because the husband is the head of the wife, just like Jesus is the head of the church. So, just as the church is to submit to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. The link is inseparable in the text. You cannot possibly understand what is meant by wives submitting to husbands without understanding the relationship between the Church and Christ. This is because there is so much similarity between the two. Just like the husband is the head of the wife, so Christ is the head of the church. Since there is that similarity in makeup and nature, there is then a similarity in relationship. So, just as the church submits to Christ, so must the wife submit to the husband.
- b. But the similarities in this relationship don't end there – in fact, they are just getting started. So the text goes on to tell the husbands how to interact with and treat and relate to their wives. They are to love their wives – and that's all that can be said before the comparison is drawn and the link is made. The husband must love the wife like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. This then leads to a fuller explanation of Christ's giving of himself for the Church. He loved her and gave himself for her so that she could be sanctified by him which happens through the cleansing of the washing of water with the word, so that she can be presented to him without sport or wrinkle or any such thing – holy and without blemish. And now at the beginning of verse 28 we have this astonishing phrase – “in the same way.” There is that inseparable link again. Christ and the Church and the marriage relationship are so similar that this text continues to talk about them interchangeably. Just like Christ has loved the church so as to purify her and make her without spot or wrinkle by the giving of himself for her, so the husband is to love his wife this way. He is to give himself for her so as to purify her and he is to love her. The bottom line on how he is to treat her is that he is to care for her like he does for his own flesh. No one ever in their right state of mind hated his own flesh and stopped caring for it, but rather he nourishes and cherishes it. And then there is that link again. It is not enough for the man to be told to love his wife like he does his own flesh, but he is given a point of comparison and illustration – Christ and the Church. The church is the flesh of Jesus – the Body of Christ – and he nourishes and cares for it because it is his own flesh – and so, just like that the man is to care for his own wife as though she were his own flesh.
- c. You see, the nature of these two relationships are so similar that the actions within these relationships are inseparably linked. Because the relationship between the wife and the husband is so similar to the church and Christ, then the wife is to relate to her husband like the church does to Christ and the husband is to relate to the wife as Christ does to the church.
- d. This inseparable link is here between marriage and Christ and the Church because they are so similar in their very nature. But this is not the only reason they are inseparably linked. They are inseparably linked because marriage has an eternal purpose that is realized in Christ and the Church.

II. An Eternal Purpose

- a. And so in verse 31 Genesis 2:24 is quoted. And if you follow the progression of thought in the text you see that the point being made is that the wife is to be cared for and nourished by the husband just like he does for his own flesh. This is to be his treatment of her because indeed, she is his flesh as was decreed in Genesis 2:24. He left father and mother, clung to his wife and now the two have become one flesh. So, in the marriage relationship, the husband is now to care for his wife like she is his own flesh, because she is his own flesh. But the inseparable link between marriage and Christ and the Church is not far behind. And so in verse 32 we are told that this

whole idea is a profound mystery. Now a mystery in the New Testament usage of the term is not something that is hidden from us that we need to discover, but rather it is something that has been previously hidden that is now being made known through progressive revelation. So, in chapter three the same word is used to describe the mystery of the Gospel hidden for ages but now being revealed through the ministry of the Apostles – namely that God’s people were now Jew and Gentile together in the unity that only redemption could bring. And so, here in chapter 5, this profound mystery is speaking of Genesis 2:24 and it is declaring to us that there is something that up to this point in revelatory history had not been known – namely that marriage as decreed in Genesis 2:24 is ultimately about Christ and the Church.

- b. So, the similarities that exist between the husband and wife relationship and the Christ and Church relationship are not mere coincidence. Rather, the decree of marriage was given by God so as to put on display the relationship between Christ and the Church. In other words, marriage as designed by God in Genesis 2 and as decreed by God in Genesis 2 was put in place ultimately as a living parable of the deeper reality of Christ and the Church. This is not to say that the other parts and points of marriage don’t matter – they do – but they don’t have the ultimate meaning that is only found when marriage is understood to point to Christ and the Church. So, marriage was given by God as a means to procreate and fill the earth. Marriage is the human relationship in which man finds completion and companionship on a level that no other human relationship can provide. The marriage relationship brings joy and love and happiness on levels that cannot be known outside of this relationship. These are all purposes of marriage, but they are lesser purposes. When we make those lesser purposes the greater purpose then we turn marriage on its head and frustrate God’s good design.
- c. Ephesians 5 is making clear to us that marriage has eternal value in that the one-flesh union that is to take place is a shadow of the greater reality of Christ and the Church.

III. A Temporal Covenant

- a. It would be helpful at this point to further convince us of this by considering the words of Christ when he was asked about marriage in the afterlife by the Sadducees.
 - i. ²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." ²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Mt. 22:23-30 ESV)
- b. What is Jesus saying here? He is saying that marriage is a temporal covenant. Marriage only lasts for this lifetime. We do not marry nor are we given in marriage in the life to come. And this is not because we are sitting around strumming harps all day as we rest blissfully on a cloud. No, we will enjoy the presence of God for all of eternity on the New Earth that will be recreated by him, but one of the obvious things that will be missing is marriage. And why is it not there? Because it doesn’t need to be there. Marriage is not in eternity because marriage is temporal. God did not design marriage between one man and one woman to be an eternal reality, but rather to point to and put on display an eternal reality. The ultimate reason we have marriage is to point forward to the greater eternal reality of Christ’s eternal union with His Bride – the Church. So, marriage does not continue on into eternity because in eternity the picture gives way to the greater reality. The shadow is consumed in the presence of the real thing.
- c. It’s like standing around the corner on a city street and you see a shadow approaching from around the corner. Human marriage as designed and decreed by God is that shadow. It is a

passing and temporal reality that has eternal value. When the man walks around the corner the shadow is consumed by the presence of the real man. This real man that consumes the shadow of human marriage is Christ and the Church.

IV. An Eternal Reality

- a. And so consider for a moment the truth that the Bible begins with a human marriage in Genesis 2, and it ends with a Divine marriage in Revelation 19. So, in Genesis 2 Adam and Eve are joined together in a lifelong, and yet temporal covenant relationship. God decrees that this is how humans must relate to one another as the key building block to society. The man is to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they become one flesh. But as we know from Jesus' words, this marriage does not last past this life – it is temporal.
- b. And then in Revelation 19 we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb where the Bride – the church – is officially and completely united to Jesus Christ for all of eternity. What was shadowed in human and temporal marriage will be fully known and experienced in eternal bliss by those who are privileged to be a part of the Bride of Christ!

And so, to make obvious the conclusion that we must draw from these texts – marriage is a lifelong covenant that has eternal value. Its eternal value is found in its very purpose. Marriage as a temporal entity is a living parable of an eternal reality. This is a game changer for how we view marriage. Marriage is no longer to be understood as being about the individual. Your spouse was not given to you to please you and to make your life great by meeting all of your expectations. No, your spouse was given to you by God so that your covenant relationship could be a display of the greater and eternal reality of Christ and the Church. Your relationship with your spouse has more at stake to it than your personal happiness – it has the very character of Christ and his relationship to the Church at stake. And so, let's make a few observations about why the why matters.

Why the Why Matters:

- It Raises the Bar
 - The reason Ephesians 5 matters when it comes to our view of marriage is because it raises the bar for marriage. In light of Ephesians 5, marriage can no longer be simply about companionship or mutual completion or met desires or having children or being a building block of society. You see, if that is all that marriage is about then when it comes down to it, none of those reasons are compelling enough to keep marriage the way God designed it. So, if marriage is primarily about meeting desires for the individual, well, if someone finds that monogamous marriage for life doesn't do that then they can tweak or completely overhaul God's design and live however they want to as long as their desires are met. And is this not what is happening in our society. People are not redefining marriage, they are redefining what makes them happy and then they are calling it marriage.
 - But in light of God's eternal purpose for marriage we cannot and must not do this. God designed and decreed marriage to be the man leaving the father and mother and holding fast to one woman for life and being made into one flesh with that woman. He designed it this way so that in shadow form it would picture what Christ was to do as he joined the church to himself. So, Jesus left the Father and gave up all in coming to give himself for his bride, the church. The Genesis 2 decree is the very first hint in the whole Scriptures of the Gospel work of Jesus Christ. This is why it has universal buying power. This is why this decree supersedes all cultural, social, and time concerns. The one common denominator in all societies is that they all should have marriage as one man leaving father and mother and holding fast to one woman for one life so that the two are made one flesh. And so, we affirm from Ephesians 5 that marriage puts on display the covenant relationship of Christ and His Church and therefore the bar of marriage is raised beyond the temporal to the eternal.

- Now, it can only do this if Genesis 2:24 is followed as the decreed pattern. So there must be this leaving of other relationships and a clinging to one relationship. There must be a holding fast to that relationship to the exclusion of all other relationships. There must be then a weaving together in that relationship of the two into one that is unlike any other relationship.
 - When marriage looks different than this decree then marriage will fundamentally not work to accomplish the eternally relevant task it was meant to accomplish – to point to Jesus and His covenantal, one-flesh union with the Church. So, for instance, if this weaving of the two into one is a weaving of two of the same – male to male or female to female – then the picture is fundamentally marred and the eternal purpose of marriage is lost. So consider the union between Christ and the Church. We are not like Christ and Christ is not like us. We are different, and yet we are made to go together by the design of God. This is what marriage is too. Two people who are not alike, but are designed to go perfectly together, and what the Scripture says about this is that it is male and female – and only one of each together that most accurately puts the covenantal bond of Christ and the church on display.
 - And so, to be clear, Gay Marriage is fundamentally wrong because Gay Marriage wrongly pictures the covenant relationship between Christ and the Church. The two joining must be different entities that are similar but not completely alike. And so one of the greatest tragedy of Gay marriage is that the eternal value of the lifelong covenant of marriage is lost by the very nature of Gay marriage.
 - The same is true about people living together without the covenant commitment of marriage. The tragedy here is that they are missing the eternal value of the lifelong covenant. They are not telling the truth about Christ and the Church and they are fundamentally misunderstanding what God has carefully designed. Therefore they will not know the blessings of this one flesh union that can only come when we operate according to God’s design.
 - And so, Marriage as God designed it to be is the unique relationship that fulfills this eternal purpose of making known the covenant relationship between Christ and the Church. And this raises the bar of marriage in general, and of your marriage in particular. There is more at stake than the individuals involved. There is eternal value in the lifelong covenant as it points to the covenant relationship between Christ and the church.
- It Informs & Motivates Christ Exalting Action in Marriage
 - Another reason why the why matters is because when we rightly understand the purpose of marriage we are now informed and motivated towards Christ exalting action in marriage. So, if marriage is primarily about my happiness and about me getting out of my spouse what I need and want, then this will determine how I will treat my spouse. I will be demanding and judgmental and critical and selfish and self-seeking. Those of us who are married have all tried that route and found that it didn’t lead to the happiness we thought it would. Those of us who are not married have all seen relationship where one or both spouses were clearly in it for themselves and you have observed that this marriage relationship is miserable and difficult and hard.
 - Doug Wilson in his book *Reforming Marriage* makes this point by saying:
 - “The reason we are miserable in our marriages is because we have idolized them. But the glory of God is more important than our domestic happiness. In the world God made, if a creature worships anything other than the Creator God, then ultimately he loses the very thing he idolizes and worships. Husbands must love their wives; they must not worship them.” (pg. 12)

- You see, Ephesians 5 helps us to understand God's design for marriage. It shows us the eternal purpose and informs us of how marriage is all about God's glory as marriage itself puts on display the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. This then informs us that our actions in marriage are to be pointed in that direction. So, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. This is the purpose and the right path for marriage. Because it is its purpose it is also the right path. Because marriage is designed to display Christ's unending love for the church and the church's unending loyalty and submission to Christ her head, then this is also the path for Christ-exalting action in marriage. Husbands love and wives submit and respect. To operate any other way turns marriage into a union primarily about us and it is exactly at that point that we lose the glorious blessing of marriage.
- To be clear here, there is great blessing and joy and happiness in marriage, but that blessing and joy and happiness are not found by making marriage about your sin-stained desire for this joy and blessing and happiness. If you make these your goal you will find nothing but frustration in marriage. God has designed happiness to be on the far end of holiness, not on the near end of it. And marriage has the wonderful and gloriously unique opportunity to make you holy as you seek to live in it according to God's design. And it is here, on the far side of holiness that you experience the deepest levels of happiness and blessing and joy. In other words, your life will never be better than when you understand and operate according to God's design in all things, and especially in marriage.

Conclusion: There is eternal value to the lifelong covenant of marriage. It is when we understand this eternal value and allow it to shape our actions within and towards marriage that we experience the deepest blessings and joys that God has designed marriage to bring. So, what about you and your marriage? Do you view it through the lens of God's eternal purpose? Do you understand that your spouse has been given to you by God so that this one flesh union can paint a picture that points to the greater and completely eternal reality of Christ and His one flesh union with His Bride, the Church? May we be rightly informed and therefore rightly motivated to live according to God's decreed design so that we tell the truth with our lives about Christ's covenant relationship with the Church. Let's pray!