

Small Group Notes

Sermon: 12 March 2023



EPHESIANS

Instructions for Christian Marriages

Ephesians 5:22-33

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 5:22-33

OVERVIEW

The relationship that should exist between a husband and wife is a subject of considerable interest, both in the early church and in our "contemporary" world today. Paul, therefore, paints a compelling picture of what the institution of marriage should be like, weaves in a reference to its origin (cf: Genesis 2: 24) and makes a bold and somewhat radical claim of what God's standards and expectations are – standards which haven't changed with the passage of time, nor diminished in importance.

There are three 'linked' lessons from the reading that reinforce Paul's message on marriage. These three connected lessons, when understood in context, allow us to appreciate why and how Christian marriage is unique (and quite opposite to what the world misunderstands marriage to be).

In a Christian marriage, Paul is instructing or reminding us that:

- 1. 'Oneness' is God's original intention for married couples**
 - 1a. Wives should embrace godly submission**
 - 1b. Husbands should be practising sacrificial love**

1. God's original intention of oneness in marriage: is what Paul call's a profound mystery. He calls the product of marriage as becoming "one flesh". This is more than the process of two consenting adults spending their lives together. It even goes beyond the safety and sanctity of

sexual relations between married couples (that is part of the oneness).

*“‘Two shall become one flesh’ implies that both the husband and the wife **gain a new and deeper richness**. Recall that God, in the beginning, said of His creation that it was very good, but it could be better yet if man were not alone. And for that reason the Lord created woman. **She is there to complete, to complement, the man**. Adam could be **totally himself only with Eve at his side**; and Eve found her purpose, her meaning in life at the side of Adam. The two... become one flesh.” (C. Bouwman, 1997)*

1.a. Wives embracing godly submission:

Submission is not a new concept in our Christian faith, and its broad understanding is helpful to appreciate how Paul uses it in this passage. It does not mean ‘subjugation or oppression’, nor any other negative connotation. But rather it is a language of worship, an action in response to love. At the start of Chapter 5 (cf vs 1 & 2), Paul encourages all believers “as dearly loved” .. “to follow”,.. “to walk” after the Lord – that is ‘godly submission’!. Submission, also literally means “sub-mission”, i.e. being under authority, on assignment, or having an awareness of a sense of duty.

Wives embracing godly submission:

- Recognizes the husband as the head of the unit (rooted in creation, & a model of Christ & Church).
- Not under oppression or servitude or defeat, but a choice to follow the husband’s

godly leadership, motivated by

- Given willingly and in delight
- Expression of love for each other and teamwork
- Full of trust, God-honoring, effective and beautiful

*"The wife is to treat her husband with deference; in other words, she is to recognize this **biblical and Christian view of marriage**, she is to regard the husband as her head, the head of this **new unit**. They are **both one**, but there is a head to the unit, as there is a head to our body, as Christ is the Head of the church." – Lloyd Jones, M. (1974)*

1. b. Husbands practising sacrificial love: We can read this passage and think that Paul is saying, "**Husbands, be kind to your wives.**" Or "**husbands, be nice to your wives.**" There is no doubt that this is important, and for many marriages, this would be a huge improvement. But that isn't what Paul wrote about. What he really meant is, "**Husbands, continually decide to practice self-denial for the sake of your wives.**"

Husbands practising sacrificial love, love as Christ did:

- Love sacrificially. Laying down his life (not literally, but dead to self, ego, pride, etc the 'old nature' that hinders sincere love)
- "Makes her (wife) holy, through the washing of the word. It means He leads his home guided by the Word. There is

something cleansing about being under the teaching of the Word of God.

- Takes an active, caring interest in his wife's spiritual health.
- Does not neglect her, but nourishes and cherish

Godly headship says, "I am your head, so I must **care for you and serve you** - expressed through sacrifice and putting the interest of the wife first.

*"On the practical level, therefore, **the whole of the husband's thinking must include his wife also.** He must not think of himself in isolation or detachment.... this is a fundamental principle of godly marriage".*

QUESTIONS

1. What part of the message spoke to you the most? And what is your personal response to it?
2. In what (practical) ways can Christian marriages serve as a picture of the Gospel to those outside the Church, and why do you think that this is important?

PRAYER TIME

- Many people have been hurt by the 'institution' of marriage (eg. as spouses, parents of children struggling in their marriages, as children whose parents didn't model godly marriage, friends,

colleagues etc of couples with marital challenges etc). Spend some time to pray for healing for anyone who is hurting, and mention their names to God if he brings specific people to mind.

- On a practical level, oneness in marriage, godly submission and sacrificial love, require God's grace and enabling. Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill all married couples to walk in this truth.

Further action:

If you would like to speak to pastoral team about this subject or need further prayer, please speak to your Small Group leader, an elder or email the church offices: info@thecitychurch.org.uk