

Message: The Difference in *Our Marriage*

Series: Relationships: *The Difference Jesus Makes!*

Text: Ephesians 5:21-33

Introduction

If *Jesus* is who He says He is, and if *we* have Jesus in our lives like we say we do, *then something should be different* about us that stands out *in* and *to* this world.

Everything good we have in this life is a shadow of the greater in God's Kingdom. Last week we looked at the importance of drawing and cultivating our identity in Christ as God's sons and daughters. This week we step into marriage; ideally as children grow into adulthood there is a transition from living with parents in the family unit to living on their own. In the context of Paul's audience this transition was often through marriage.

While some of us may be single, divorced, beyond our first marriage, widowed or just flat out giving up on being happily married- what Paul is talking about here is an intimacy found through a relationship with God. In whatever state or season you are in right now, God offers joy and intimacy in Him through Jesus.

This is a message to encourage, strengthen, challenge, heal, and above all, see the intimacy of God break through into our marriages and overflow into the world around us. *But, before God will do a work **through** us, He desires to do a work **within** us!*

I. The Gift of Intimacy (Vv.21-28)

Before we jump into our text I wanted to lay some ground work on what is going on here. In Genesis 1, in the very beginning of our story (not God's; He is self-existing and eternal), we read of God speaking into existence all things. God creates, calls for light, water, land, the expanse of the universe, as well as all plant and animal life. He created living things with the ability to reproduce themselves; to continue the movement of creation.

When we come to verses 26-28, we see God within Himself (Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit) creating uniquely in His own Image, male and female.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over [a]all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that [b]moves on the earth." -Genesis 1:26-28

In this Creative act, distinct from all that had been created up to this point, God gives man and woman something special beyond the act of reproducing. A little more detail is shared in Genesis 2:18-25

18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." 19 Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to [a]Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He [b]made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

23 And Adam said:

*"This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called [c]Woman,
Because she was taken out of [d]Man."*

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be[e] joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.
-Genesis 2:18-25

God wanted more for those created in His Image than just reproduction. He wanted humanity, He wants us, to know what He experiences within Himself and is inviting us to step into. **Intimacy.** Intimacy is the journey of doing life together that blossoms into an act that has the potential to produce new life.

God didn't want humanity reproducing like vegetation or animal life; He wanted us to reproduce in the same way He desired within Himself to share in an act that created us in Adam and Eve. This experience of intimacy that blossoms into sexual expression was God's gift to us through marriage. In the beginning, before sin, we see the creation of life on earth **drawing identity and love** from humanity (Adam named them), and humanity **drawing their identity and love from** God. God's love flowed into humanity, and that overflowed into the world. This was Eden. This was paradise. **This was Heaven and Earth together; two having become as one.**

However, because of sin, this shattered the union between God and humanity, and everything became broken and distorted. Including the intimacy God gave; it is still here. However, it has become fueled by lust rather than love, and is focused on self-gratification rather than selfless abandonment. There is not submission of anything within us to anything that is God.

Until Jesus came and healed that wound, connecting us once again to the Father. The road of submission is restored, and we are all invited to know His intimacy again!

a. Experienced in Singleness (Friendship)

Now, let's jump into our text by backing up a bit to Ephesians 5:18-21.

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of [a]God -Ephesians 5:18-21

When we place faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we became the sons and daughters of God. Our life now in Him is one where His Spirit lives within us, resourcing us with all that we need to know the intimacy of His love toward us. As we submit to Him individually, we submit in the recognition that we are family with each other in Jesus now as well. We are the church- gifted of the Spirit to be resourced and trained to know the Victory of Jesus over every part of our lives as we go out and share this with the world.

As we do life, as we grow, we develop friendships that gain in levels of intimacy. BFF's, inner circle- those we open more of our selves up to brings the joy of intimacy of knowing others and being known. These are wonderful relationships to have; Jesus Himself invested and cultivated this. Among the thousands that followed throughout His earthly ministry, 70-72 became Disciples He sent out 2 by 2; then there were 12 He was more intimate with. And even deeper in, there were 3 that shared a greater intimacy with Jesus.

There are times such relationships experience levels of intimacy that stimulate sexuality and a desire to connect with someone and share this. Other times, there is the natural awakening of desire rooted in sexuality that comes into season desiring to be explored. In all these avenues, we must understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17) and as believers in Jesus, as a part of God's family and Kingdom, we must bring ourselves in His love and strength to be submissive to His Will over intimacy and sexuality. That is why there is so much warning against sexual sins; they have a more far-reaching, ghostlike presence in our lives that other sins we may commit.

This is why as a parent as well as in pre-marital counseling we discuss God's desire for sex and come to a place of transparency in how we have walked with Jesus in this area of our lives. Hear me in all the love of the Gospel with this. **Those who are not living in submission to Jesus in their sexuality in singlehood will most likely not live in submission to Jesus in their sexuality in the commitment marriage requires. Marriage does not fix things. Jesus heals. Only Jesus heals.** That is why Paul went into such detail last week; let's get this right in our singleness before we get into marriage (if at all possible).

When we learn to live in submission to God- *His Word, His leading, His direction*, the more we stand to gain in our relationships with each other in the Body of Christ. The more intimate His Joy is. The more we grow in Christ, the more Christ can and will do through us. Remember, Christ desires to pour into us in a way that we overflow into the lives of others. (Think: New Wine Skins) But let's stay on track with relationships.

b. Blossoms in Marriage

When a relationship transitions between a man and a woman, the desire for greater intimacy is beginning to come alive for each other, marriage becomes a part of the conversation. In the culture of the Bible, this was traditionally a process that would see a lengthy courtship leading into a transition of the woman from her family into that of the husband's family and name. That's the platform Paul is writing from. *We need to understand this.*

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might [a]sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. -Ephesians 5:22-28

God gifts a level of intimacy that is to be contained within the framework of marriage. ***What Paul is saying here is to wives and husbands specifically, not women and men generally.*** Hear this. *Church, please hear this.* Many champion forward a Gospel that ***subjugates*** rather than ***liberates*** because we parrot what we have been told; not what God may actually be saying. All of God's Word has a context; before we elaborate on an idea let us make sure we grasp the context. **The Context is the way God gave His Kingdom Truth to us in His Word and preserves it from generation to generation. Not the culture that produced the context. We are not trying to replicate First Century Jewish or Roman culture. We are seeking Kingdom Culture which is not limited to this earthly confine anymore than our spirits are to our earthly bodies.**

Remember, Marriage was instituted before sin became a part of our story. What Jesus restores is the connection between us and the Father, and the intimacy in our relationship with Him and each other. This appeal to live this way goes back to the original design of God. The difference Jesus makes in our marriages is that it can again be the place Heaven and Earth meet and do life together.

The ***earthly marriage*** is a shadow of a ***heavenly union*** we are all a part of because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Marriage is this world's greatest treasure when it comes to seeing and understanding the relationship we have with God. *And because of this, it should be no wonder it is the most distorted by sin and sought to be destroyed by the enemy of our souls!*

The subjection here is first realized in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ as individuals. As we come into a marriage union, it is proportioned to the wife. The wife is to **submit** to her husband in everything. What does this mean? The Greek, *idios*, refers to identity. In this context, the wife even with her husband absent, can be seen and understood to belong to him by how she conducts herself. Do you hear this? Hmmm- that's started to open this passage up a bit more. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23) Usage example: One Jesus / Two identities: Dead or Alive? (Acts 25:19) **In this word submission, everything about the wife proclaims she is committed in marriage to another!** I often do not wear my wedding ring; my fingers swell due to eczema all the time. However, there is never a question on my marital status and commitment.

but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. -Acts 25:19

Before we step deeper into that, let's look at the role of the husband here. The husband is to be the head of the wife in the marriage and love her selflessly with self-sacrifice. This role is to be leading the wife in directions that see her grow into the holiness that Jesus provides; and in this he experiences this holiness himself. For the two are one; to love her is to love himself. And as such, to love himself is to neglect her.

Both the husband and wife are to have their eyes on Jesus. Both are to submit to the roles unique to their positions. But where do these positions come from? What are they modeled after?

c. An earthly experience blossoms into a Kingdom Reality

The story of redemption was woven into Creation before sin ever became a reality for us. This world and all that it has become and will become, was always God's A plan. It was always His plan to love us despite our sin, pursue us despite our running, receive us despite our rejection, and to share Himself with us for all eternity despite our unfaithfulness- all through Jesus, His Son and His death, burial, and resurrection.

My daughters are both so creative. One likes to write, the other loves to illustrate. A story without picture requires imagination; pictures without narrative are left to the interpretation of the eyes of the beholder. The Gospel is illustrated in so many ways by so many things in the Bible; but nothing so fully and intimately as marriage.

The position of the wife is the earthly shadow us all of us who place faith in Jesus; depending fully on His self-sacrifice and selfless love and devotion to sanctify and cleanse us through washing of water and the word. **The world knows we belong to Jesus.** The position of the husband is the earthly shadow of the Heavenly position Jesus has, our Head who is not subject to us, but to His Father who has declared His love over us. In Jesus we inherit His Name and become a part of His family, leaving our former life behind.

The earthly husband role also demonstrates the Heavenly duties Jesus has- to present us to Himself (Father, Son, and Spirit) without spot or wrinkle, to step into and share in the Glory of God!!

For both He who [a]sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying:

*“I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” -Hebrews 2:11-13*

*For as a young man marries a virgin,
So shall your sons marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you. -Isaiah 62:5*

*And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:
-John 17:22*

The Union that God has within Himself (Father, Son, and Spirit) is shaped out with the Son submitting to the Father; the Father pouring out perfect love on the Son. Glory is the active pleasure (intimacy- “it is good”) experienced in this perfect union. In this, marriage is created to show how we are invited into sharing this Glory with God. Through His Son.

The wife is called to live in submission to the Husband, as the Husband pours out love upon her. The church is to live in submission to Jesus, who overflows the love of the Father into us. **In this, marriage is an earthly experience that blossoms into a heavenly reality of intimacy!**

II. Nourish & Cherish (Vv.29-30)

*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, [a]of His flesh and of His bones.
-Ephesians 5:29-30*

As Jesus cleanses us from sin through the washing of water, symbolized by baptism, and the word we see the role He fills by nourishing us as His Bride. **Nourish** here means to feed with wholesome food; healthy Kingdom food that will carry us forward into maturity. **Cherish** is to do this through the tender love His affection brings to us.

This pours into our marriages as we lead our spouses into the wholesome nourishment God’s Word and the Community of Gathered saints brings; being in His Word and Prayer, filled with His Spirit to overflow into each other’s lives. To pursue the best for our marriages outside of this is foolish. People may have marriages that go the distance; that exist and are enriching without Jesus. But they will never experience the intimacy God intends without Jesus. Never.

A healthy body doesn't just happen; it is pursued. A healthy marriage doesn't just happen; it must be pursued- both mutually walking with Jesus (imitating God) being filled by Him to overflow into each other's lives. And it all must be done in and with a love that encourages and cultivates trust, leading into greater levels of intimacy.

Pastor, worship today didn't do anything for me! I need more of this or that! How was your relationship with God Monday through Saturday? Fix that, there will be greater intimacy Sunday Morning in worship. Worship is not an act; it is the result of living a life of worship. *If we make Sunday morning the holy and the rest of the week secular, we are missing it.*

Pastor, we don't have a healthy intimacy in our sex life! I need more of this or that! How is your love in the other hours of the day, days of the weeks, months of the year? Invest in being filled with Jesus to overflow into your spouse daily / hourly, greater intimacy will be experienced. Sex is not an act; it is the result of living intimately with our spouse. *If we make sex the source of intimacy and the rest of the marriage a chore or duty, we are missing it.*

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. -1 Corinthians 7:4-6

III. Two Becoming One (Heaven & Earth) (Vv.31-32)

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. -Ephesians 5:31-32

Through Jesus, we can know the intimacy God created us to experience in Him individually and then collectively as family in Christ. There is no greater illustration of this than marriage. God is for you. God is for your marriage. **The difference Jesus can make is that of Glorious**

Intimacy- a husband and wife can share in the intimacy enjoyed within the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) and it has the potential to blossom into the creation of a new life.

We leave our former way of life, that identity, and step into His. We carry Jesus' Name. We are a part of Jesus' family. We have all the Father's love poured into Him, overflowing into each of us, and then into each other. **Jesus has given and shared with us ALL that He has received from the Father.**

The world can see and know that we belong (submission) to another; for instead of a ring, we are sealed with His Spirit for the wedding day where He will present us holy, without blemish or spot, to the Father in a wedding feast that sees all of eternity ushered in.

In this paradigm, people experience life in marriage longer than life outside of marriage. This again shows the difference life with Jesus has for us than life lived in this broken, dying world in our old sinful natures. The new has come. The new is forever.

IV. Cultivating Intimacy (v.33)

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. -Ephesians 5:33

Being faithful. Jesus brought the heart of God to us. If we don't commit adultery, we have not broken the commandment. We have not sinned. Yet Jesus said if we look and lust, we have committed adultery in our heart and are guilty of sin. Faithfulness doesn't just happen; it is cultivated, it is pursued.

God knows what it is to be cheated on, hurt, denied, rejected, and on and on. Yet He is full of mercy, grace, eager to forgive and restore. This is bad news to the devil and our sin; but this is great news for you and me. This is great news for our marriages if we are willing to receive what this means.

A wife will never in this life live up to complete surrender to her spouse as the church is called to live in complete surrender to Christ. This does not mean the Spirit does not resource, convict, and lead us to grow into this more and more.

A husband will never in this life love with Christlike perfection. This does not mean the Spirit does not resource, convict, and lead us to grow into this more and more.

Marriage is a journey of two people walking with Jesus together, sharing in a Divine Intimacy reflecting the Glory of God. It is designed to transform and make us Holy.

V. Conclusion & Application-*Jesus bridges the intimacy of the Heavenly to our Earthly. Kingdom Comes, Will is Done on earth as it is in Heaven!*