

EPHESIANS #87 5:21-33
MARRIAGE BY THE BOOK

(Ephesians 5) Without question our text for this morning contains the Bible's most extensive treatment of marriage. Is this an important subject? Few things I know of will so impact your life. The billionaire, J. Paul Getty once said, "I would give all of my millions for one lasting marital success." Success in marriage, is clearly one of the most critical ingredients to a happy life, an abundant life. Marriage is a big stakes kind of enterprise. And it is not easy. Helen Rowland says that marriage is like twirling a baton, doing handsprings, or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it. I have often said that marriage is just about the hardest thing I have ever done. But it is like a tough oyster, once you get open the shell you find a pearl of great price and great beauty. A good marriage will be worth whatever you put into it. And what you get out certainly correlates to what you put in. One thing worth putting in to your marriage is some study. Who of us is an expert on the subject? Who of us comprehends sufficiently the intricacies of marriage or the delicate emotions of our spouse? Given the weight and challenge of marriage, rare is the person who has given it sufficient attention and sufficient thought. But will you join with me to make some progress on that today. Ephesians 5:**21-33**

be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

It is not my purpose today to break this passage down and look at its specific parts, its teaching about the role of the wife, and the role of the husband, but I am choosing instead to look at the passage in a broader way, asking what can be learned from this portion of God's word about marriage in general. When I approach the passage asking that question I come up with six answers. Let's take a few minutes to look at each.

First of all we see here that God is the Inventor and the Regulator of marriage. Marriage is not something that came to be due to evolution. It wasn't the idea of some great emperor. It wasn't foisted upon us by the devil. Marriage is God's idea. Verse 31 mentions the beginnings of the institution back in Genesis when God brought Adam to Eve in all of her pre-fig-leaf glory and said to him Genesis 2:24 *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.* And Adam looked at Eve and said, "Woah! Man.! I don't know what a father and mother is but I'll be happy to leave them for this." It was God's idea. He saw in Genesis 2 that Adam was lonely and he fashioned a helper suitable to him. And as He does with so many of His gifts, the Lord provides instruction on how to enjoy the gift. Praise God that He has spoken to us a word that is true and pure and relevant for a society like ours in which confusion is king. We are not left to waiver between the opinions of men, wondering if the Ayatollah or Dr. Phil or Dan Hendley has the right view of what marriage is to be. God has spoken. And if I rightly and fairly deal with what He has said don't you leave here and say, "I disagree with that preacher." You have a much bigger problem than that. You must deal with your heart's disposition toward God and His authority.

Speaking of authorities on marriage, listen to some great lines from the late actress, Elizabeth Taylor, or should I call her Elizabeth Taylor Hilton Wilding Todd Fisher Burton Warner Fortensky - married 8 times, 7 husbands. She should certainly know the subject huh? Nah. But at least we can learn something from her. Here are some of her statements about her marriages. 1950 –*Your heart knows when you meet the right man. There is no doubt Nicky is the one I want to spend my life with.* 1952 – *I just want to be with Michael, to be his wife. This is for me the beginning of a happy end.* 1957- marriage to Mike Todd. *I have given him my eternal love. This marriage will last forever.* 1959 was Eddie Fisher. *We will be on our honeymoon for 30 or 40 years.* 1964- Richard Burton –*I love him enough to stand by him, no matter what he might do.* 1975 – Richard again – *There will be no more marriages or divorces. We are stuck like chicken feathers to tar- for always.* 14 months later she married John Warner and said: *I don't think of John as husband #7. He's #1 all the way. I want to spend the rest of my life with him and be buried with him.* 1991- Larry Fortensky. *He is a real man. With God's blessing, this is it forever.* Did you notice that on marriage #8 she finally decided to include God in the picture? May you learn this seven marriages sooner. God is the expert. God is the Inventor. God is the Regulator of marriage and God is the key to its success. Listen to what He has to say.

Point #2. Our text shows us that the marriage relationship depends on and is connected to our God-relationship. (R) The first relationship a human ever knew was with whom? With God. Adam knew God before He knew Eve and your relationship with God must always come first. Putting your spouse first in your life may sound like the way to marital happiness, but it certainly is not. Years ago my girls and I watched the movie *Emma*, based on the Jane Austen novel. As the movie ended we had a little reflection time. I asked my girls this question, "*According to this movie, and I suppose, the novel, what is the most important thing in the world for someone to be happy?*" The answer was obvious. The movie equated happiness in life with success at romance. From most of our movies and novels and TV shows and songs this is the conclusion you would draw. But Scripture would say otherwise. Romance and marriage are important, no doubt. But many of you, and especially some of you ladies, need to understand that life is not all about romance. That is not the key to happiness and you will never find a love with any man or woman that is totally fulfilling. The primary relationship of life is with God. I remind you of the context in which we find the teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5. It comes as part of Paul's description of the Spirit-filled life. Ephesians 5:**18** *do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, A good marriage relationship is the fruit of a good Holy Spirit relationship in which one is brought under the Spirit's control and the Spirit's blessing. There is a spiritual root to the plant of marital bliss. And there is a connectedness here you must not miss. The Spirit-filled woman will be a certain kind of wife. The Spirit-filled man will be a certain kind of husband. And their relationship to each other reflects their relationship with God. Isn't that what it means when it says that a marriage is a picture of Christ and the church? You cannot separate your married life from your spiritual life. (R) To improve the one is to improve the other and to damage one is to damage both. Marriage properly understood is a covenant of companionship and that covenant includes more than two parties. God is a party to every proper marriage. One of the most disturbing trends in the last few years in our society is the move to separate one's marital behavior from the rest of life. England is wrestling with the problem of having an adulterer on deck to become king. The United States has sort of already declared it to be no problem. Some of you will remember the flap over the female Lt. who got the boot from the Air Force for having an affair with an underling. The argument of many was that her love life is nobody's business. One writer said we have to grow up as a society, and become adult about adultery, recognizing that all the poor girl did was end a marriage. Whether she can be trusted to keep a wedding vow shouldn't affect our decision on*

entrusting her with nuclear weapons. But that foolish comment fails to see the connection between how one treats a husband and how one treats God, which affects everything about us. If you care about your marriage, one thing you must do is nurture your walk with God.

On to point #3 which is that married life is viewed in Scripture as normal but not necessary. (R) God spends half a chapter of Scripture teaching on marriage because He knows, as He planned, that most of his people would live in a married state. But, I would remind you of God's approval and recommendation of singleness. This follows closely on my comments concerning the worldview of Emma. I remember a conversation with a single woman in our church who claimed that there was no way to be happy if you were single. Now, I learn, she is as unhappily married as she was single. Her viewpoint, which is typical, was and is unscriptural. The man who wrote Ephesians 5 was single and happy. In I Corinthians 7 he recommended to his readers the single lifestyle for one primary reason. **32-35** *But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.*

Singleness has its drawbacks to be sure, but in that estate one is surely less distracted in his devotion to Christ. There are so many things the single person can do that the married person cannot. When he was twenty-three our son went overseas to a Muslim country with Campus Crusade and part of his reasoning for participating in a high-risk ministry was that doing something like that was wise stewardship of his singleness at the time. Such a thing is complicated tremendously by marriage.

A married couple was celebrating their 50th anniversary when the wife noticed that the husband was crying. What's wrong she asked him. "Oh," he replied: "50 years ago today your daddy put a shotgun to my head and said that if I didn't marry you, he'd put me in jail for the next 50 years. If I had listened to him, I'd be a free man tomorrow." I hope you don't feel that way about your marriage, but there surely is a certain bondage in marriage. But it is a bondage most of us have chosen and will choose because of the benefits. It amazes me how people coming out of a bad marriage are usually so eager to get into another one. Marriage is like the army. It gets a lot of

complaints but most people re-enlist. Certainly there is a powerful force driving us toward intimacy with the opposite sex. As a result, marriage is normal, is common, but not necessary or even preferred for all. I Corinthians 7:17 *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.* It says that whether you are single or married, walk with the Lord, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That, not marriage, is what we need most.

Fourthly, we see from Ephesians 5 that marriage means the joining of one male and one female for life.(R) Perpetual monogamy. There are really three things contained in this statement. First is the point about the one. 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife.* Everything here is singular. Christ has one church, and the church has one Lord and monogamy only reflects that. When God saw that Adam was lonely He didn't make him a harem. That is not God's design. Yeah, well what about David and Solomon and Jacob and all those guys with their multiple wives? I admit to you that I find the polygamy of Old Testament heroes a mystery, a puzzle. By no means do I see God approving of them for it. If you read their stories you find that having extra wives resulted in nothing but grief for them. The direct condemnation I would expect is lacking in the Old Testament but there is no encouragement to this at all. And in the New Testament we find the expectation of monogamy and the prohibition against church officers who were polygamists. God's rule is to have no more than one spouse. And if you understand the teaching about Christ and the church this should be evident.

The second part of point #4 is the male and female aspect. Marriage involves a husband and a wife, not two husbands, not two wives. God created Adam and Eve, male and female. This point would not have been necessary even thirty years ago but you all know what has happened in our culture with the moral revolution of recent years. The idea of same-sex marriage is like that of a four-sided triangle. It could not be further from God's design and no one who is half-serious about Scriptural authority could propose such a thing. Nature itself teaches us that the family begins with a male/female union and the Bible calls anything but that an abomination. Here we stand, on the authority of God's word. We can do no other. We must certainly stand with compassion for those who struggle, but here we do stand. Now – if you need more on this part of our subject for today, check out the sermon I preached here on October 28, 2012.

The third part of point #4 is the lifetime aspect. God's plan is violated thru polygamy, thru homosex, or thru divorce. What many are into nowadays is not polygamy or adultery but a consecutive monogamy. This is the Liz Taylor plan. Someone said, "Liz Taylor doesn't like men,

she likes cake." This is the Zsa Zsa Gabor plan. Zsa Zsa who has been married 7 times says, "I always say a girl must get married for love - and just keep getting married until she finds it." She also said: *I am a marvelous housekeeper. Every time I leave a man I keep his house.* That's where a lot of folks are. Easy come, easy go. And we have become far too accepting of all this. Check this out. This is an actual ad someone found in their local paper and sent into the Tonight Show. (divorce pic) *Tiffany Room, 3 out of 5 marriages end in divorce, don't spend a fortune on your reception, celebrate with us and save!* Unbelievable! We take vows to be committed to each other in sickness and in health, joy and sorrow, richer or poorer, till death shall part us or until we change our minds. You'd hope that we'd have the honesty to restructure the vows although I really don't know if that would be better. William Bennett writes of attending a wedding in which the bride and groom pledged to remain together "*as long as love shall last.*" Bennett says, "*I sent paper plates as my wedding gift.*" God says, "No" to this folly. Anything but life-long fidelity distorts the truth our marriages are to reflect. In our text we learn this rule by the analogy of Christ and His church. If a wife relates to her husband as the church to Christ how long will she be faithful? If the husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church how long will that love last? Christ-like love is never seasonal. Marriage according to Ephesians 5 involves one man and one woman until death shall part them.

The fifth thing we learn about marriage from Ephesians 5 is that there are distinctive roles for the sexes. (R) There are instructions for the wife and for the husband and they are not the same are they? We can study those roles another time, but today just notice that they are different and the role of the sexes differ in large part because the sexes differ. Duh? It's incredible that our sin-sick world can get so deluded that we try to pretend otherwise. Men and women differ dramatically, and the physical distinctions are just the beginning. Norm Wright (Understanding the Male in Your Life) gives this list. *Men snore more; they fight more; they change their minds more often than women do; their blood is redder, their daylight vision superior, they have thicker skin and longer vocal cords; their metabolic rate is higher; they age faster, they wrinkle later, they talk about themselves less, they worry about themselves more and they are not as sensitive to others as women are.* "Yea, that's us Bro!" Oh come on preacher those are stereotypes." Maybe so, but have you ever stopped to consider where stereotypes come from? They are usually based on something that is generally true. Is it a stereotype to say that women are more emotionally expressive than men? That statement is not meant to be absolute. Certainly there are some men who are more emotionally

expressive than some women but there can be no doubt about the basic accuracy of that statement. Do women talk more than men? I have a joke book that include several on the theme of the talkative woman. There's the one about the preacher arriving at the hospital to comfort a family after their father had died. He asked the man's son, "*Did your dad have any last words?*" And the boy said, "*No sir, momma was with him to the end.*" Now, why are these jokes considered funny? They touch on something we all know is true. Women are more verbal and it begins from the time they are tiny. James Dobson did a study of this and really did discover that the average married man has a daily quota of about 15,000 words. The average woman has a daily quota of 25,000. Dobson says the problem this creates is that the man goes off to work and by the time his workday is done he has used his 15,000, but he comes home to a wife who still has 10,000 words or more left in her day. And one of the most frequent complaints counselors hear from wives is what? "*my husband won't talk to me.*" Fact is women are more verbal - they can talk, want to talk, need to talk and do talk more than men.

And what about intelligence? This is a sensitive one. Only a dumb male would even address it. By normal standards of IQ assessment men do score slightly higher on the average. Certainly men are superior when it comes to high-level abstractions. Elisabeth Elliot (*Let Me Be a Woman* p.146) makes this point. *One demonstration of this is the fact that while there are at present 82 Grand Masters in chess, not one is a woman. Of the 500 greatest chess players in history, not one has been a woman. But thousands of women, particularly in Russia play chess.* But don't let that make you feel superior men. Here is another set of statistics that pertain to something more important than chess and math. *Men commit over 90% of major crimes of violence, 100% of rapes, 95% of burglaries. They comprise 94% of drunk drivers, 70% of suicides, 91% of offenders against family and children.* (Straight Talk p.156,157) How is that for equality? Is that what you feminist want to be equal to? Well, these different abilities, these various strengths and weaknesses lead men and women to different roles, some of which are specifically defined for us in Scripture. But let's get this much straight. In the eyes of God male and female are of equal worth. We have much in common, but we have some very deep, God-ordained differences as well. Anyone who denies that is clearly speaking unbiblically. Our privilege as men and women is to delight in those differences and use them to serve one another in love, which leads to our sixth and final point.

The sixth thing we learn about marriage from Ephesians 5 is that the goal of marriage is oneness (R). God intends to blend these two very different personalities into one whole, beautiful compound

product. Ephesians 5:31 *FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.* So profound is this unity that in verse 28 *So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.* This oneness means that you are organically bound together and the sexual bonding is an expression of the emotional bonding. The oneness God wants to see is best expressed in our language by the term "intimacy." (R) Our marriages are to be moving into an ever greater expression of intimacy, in the same way as the church and the Lord grow together in intimacy. So, the goal of a Christian married couple is what? Not survival. Not the avoidance of divorce or the avoidance of homicide. Too many are satisfied if they can just hang on. And God knows, maybe that is the best you can expect, but if the Spirit of the Lord is at work in you I would anticipate that your marriage will more and more reflect the growing intimacy of Christ and His church. That's the goal. But I think Oliver Butterfield was sadly accurate when he said that an appalling number of husbands and wives are not really married but are simply "undivorced." (R) Others who lack intimacy are predivorced. Rodney Dangerfield said this about his marriage, *"We sleep in separate rooms, have dinner apart, take separate vacation - we're doing everything we can to keep our marriage together."* That's not marriage is it? That's a legal fiction. Maybe you know well the verse that says God hates divorce, and that is surely true. But there is also something God loves. He loves to see His sons and daughters coming together, working thru their differences, learning to love and growing into a compatible, united team that will express by their love, affection, commitment and devotion the relationship of Jesus and His bride. That sounds wonderful and it is, but to get there requires a whole lot of long, trying conversations that will wound your pride, and break you down, and humble you until you are ready to be exalted and made one.

Are you ready to go beyond avoiding what God hates? You ready to offer to the Lord in your marriage what He loves? Listen, I know how hard this is. Few of you were married with the advantages Beth and I had. We were well taught, healthy, minimal debt, unified in our spiritual commitments with supportive families and lots of friends and we've endured some real struggles in our 35 years. It has been a challenge, but I can honestly say that neither of us has given up and both of us are pursuing hard this prize of oneness with evident progress because we believe it is worth the race and we hope in God's Spirit. Will you do this too? Will you rededicate yourself this morning to that man or woman God has given you? Will you renew your vows to God and each

other, and renew your hope, and whether married or single, sink your faith deep into the power and love of God, the Creator of marriage and the world's most wonderful counselor?

For some of you, I hope you decide to attend a marriage conference together. For others I encourage you to read a marriage book together and start talking again. Others may need to make an appointment with a pastor or marriage counselor. For those unmarried and pre-married you store what you have heard away and take advantage of your singleness to run hard after an intimacy with God. It is by God's Spirit that we can face the challenges of singleness, the challenges of marriage and find in God's time sweet, sweet, victory. Let's pray.