

# EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: "A Christ-Shaped Marriage"

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SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:22-33

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The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

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If you read Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22, you'll see that the bookends of Scripture both include powerful pictures of marriage. The first pages of the Bible include the marriages of God and humanity, of heaven and earth, and of Adam and Eve. And in the last pages of the Bible, when heaven and earth are finally and fully brought together again, Jesus the Groom is united with his Bride, the people of God. So, what are these marriage bookends communicating? They tell us what the whole story is all about. They let us know that Scripture is about God pursuing covenant love and intimacy with humanity. Despite our wayward and deceived hearts, God longs to draw us into covenant life and partnership with him. And one of the most immediate applications of this is that our marriages mean more than we could ever imagine.

Think about it: If you're a follower of Jesus and you're married, your marriage is not supremely about you finding the one. It's not foremost about your emotional or relational needs being met. It's not mainly about your comfort, your finances, your dreams, your sex life, your personality, your kids, your schedule, or your preferences. If you're a Christian, your marriage should be a rehearsal and a reenactment of his unwavering, pursuing covenant faithfulness. Your marriage is about putting God's love in Christ on display. Again, there's more at stake in our marriages than we could ever imagine. So,

How should we reimagine our marriages so that they point to God and not to us?

Enter Ephesians 5. In the last dozen verses of this chapter, the Apostle Paul helps us answer this question. However, because this passage has been misused and misapplied, it's helpful to state what this text isn't saying. Ephesians 5 does not teach that all women submit to all men. Ephesians 5 doesn't teach that men are the decision-makers and that women can't work outside the home. Ephesians doesn't teach that men are the authoritarians and/or disciplinarians in the home. These are several among many claims that have been wrongly drawn from Paul's words. These ideas and others can serve as negative examples of how we shouldn't reimagine our marriages. But before we get to the specifics of rethinking our marriages, it's important to state how we should broadly consider marriage. First,

Your marriage should be a place where you are nudged to love Jesus more.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, there are about 200 words in Greek, and over half of them are not about earthly marriages but about Jesus and the church. Why? Because Paul knows about the Bible's bookends. He knows that Christian marriage is a metaphor bigger than the reality we experience it to be. So, over time, because of the patience and forgiveness and struggles and highs and lows of your marriage, you should be pushed to see Jesus' perfect love and forgiveness toward his people (see 5:25-27). Obviously, you won't do your marriage perfectly. Your spouse won't do marriage perfectly. But these things are to get you to realize that you both need Jesus' help in your marriage because he does do marriage perfectly. And this is inseparably linked to a second consideration,

Your marriage should be a place where you are nudged to love the church more.

This is logical. If you love Jesus, you're supposed to love what Jesus loves. Jesus loves the church, so you should too. And your marriage should push you there. When Paul gets to verse 32, he worshipfully throws his hands in the air and says, "This is such a profound mystery – Christ and the church." He's implying that he doesn't know where the reality ends and the metaphor begins between husbands and wives and Christ and the church. But his implied rationale is as follows: Because Jesus gave himself for you, you should give yourself to your spouse. And now your marriage should make you give yourself to Jesus *and* to his bride, the church. If your marriage drives you into isolation and away from people, then it's not rightly focused on Jesus. Christian marriage should lead you to give your life away in presence and service and with time and energy to the church.

Now to the specifics. In Scripture, God is triune. This is another mystery, that he is three persons and one essence. Father, Son, and Spirit are all fully God. Each is worthy of worship, trust, obedience, and devotion. But each carries out their divinity distinctly. Because Jesus died on the cross, that doesn't make him less divine than the Father and the Spirit. Meaning, within the Trinity, there is both equality in essence and distinction in function. There is no hierarchy in God himself. The same is true of his image-bearers. So, when Paul says, "Wives, submit to your husbands," and "Husbands, love your wives," he's not talking about superiority or inferiority. He's not talking about a hierarchy. He's talking about uniqueness in role and responsibility. He's talking about the mechanics of reimagining our marriages. This is a call to reflect equality in essence and distinction in function that exists within God himself.

So, the primary call to Christian wives in 5:22 is that they would submit to their husbands. What does this mean? Well, this word submit applies to all Christians in 5:21, and their submission is a conscious decision about the dignity and worth of others, and making that a higher priority than your own wants and rights. So, here at 5:22 it sounds a little like this: "Wives, make a conscious decision to see your husband as an image-bearer, a gift from God. And make his desires a higher priority than your own." Trust him. Esteem him. Respect him (5:33). Give him the benefit of the doubt. A husband can feel so defeated without the encouragement of his wife. And submission that is requested by the husband isn't submission. True submission is freely given by the wife. Furthermore, this passage would've been liberating to women in the first century. In the Greco-Roman world, husbands held a position of hierarchical dominance and control. But for a woman in Ephesus to hear that her husband was called to lay down his life for her, this would've brought freedom to her heart.

Sadly, as Chrystie Cole writes, the temptation for many women is to autonomy. She writes, "If a woman rejects her calling and embraces autonomy, she becomes further absorbed with self, resulting in either self-promotion or self-protection. She will either move into a position of self-protection, defending herself from anything perceived as negative. Or, she will self-promote, elevating herself and leveraging her power over others." Essentially, when a married woman doesn't submit to her husband, she submits to herself, and that is the sin of autonomy.

Next, the primary call to Christian husbands in 5:25 is to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This is a call to die. Godly husbands will die to their preferences, their money, and their schedule. They should learn to die to their dreams, and not exclude her aspirations. They should learn to die to their hobbies, and that their free time isn't theirs anymore. They should learn to die to self, and stop trying to have it their way... All to love their wife like Jesus loved the church. Beyond this, Paul uses the words "nourish and cherish" in 5:29. These are words about tenderness and kindness, about empathy and grace. So, along with dying to self, godly husbands are called to be present and listening and near. They are called to treasure their wife, date their wife, pray for her, and pray with her. They should let her know that she is needed, valued, and cherished.

Sadly, as Chrystie Cole writes, the man's temptation is to passivity. If a man rejects his calling and becomes passive, he will become silent when he should speak, he'll be tempted toward stillness when he should act, and he'll be tempted toward abandonment when he should be present." Essentially, when a married man doesn't actively love his wife, his apathetic lack of engagement will paint him into the sin of passivity.

With these things in view, a more clear picture emerges:

In a Christian marriage, wives should resist autonomy by submitting to their husbands in support, strength, trust, and encouragement, husbands should resist passivity by sacrificially loving their wives with grace, compassion, devotion, and joy.

According to Ephesians 5, yes, there should be a mutual submission and deference to one another. And Paul tells us it should look something like this (above). But how do we have any hope of living these things out? Why is this the shape of Christian marriage? Because this is the entire shape of the Christian story. Jesus is the only hope we have of living these things out, and we should have Jesus-shaped marriages because the Bible tells a Jesus-shaped story. The whole Bible begins and ends with marriage bookends. And that means that all of our marriages are little windows through which people can see God's covenant kindness. We can't do this on our own. We have to depend on Jesus for this, so that our marriages would be living pictures of the gospel, so that other people could see the sin-forgiving, death-conquering, hope-sustaining love of God in him.

Finally, our reimagining marriage around Jesus should make us love him more. It should make us love his church more. And it should draw us into life and intimacy with our spouses, and posture our hearts towards them in service and care... All so that God himself will be seen as glorious and good. So, who leads a Christian marriage? Jesus does. He sings lead. He is the melody to God's purposes in the world. We're each just learning to sing our harmony parts so that the gospel song resounds more beautifully for a listening world.

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### *Community Group Questions*

1. What stands out to you the most about this passage or message?
2. Who has a marriage that you want to emulate? Why?
3. Personally, what is the best thing about your marriage? Or, if you're unmarried, what are you most looking forward to about marriage?
4. When have you felt your marriage draw you to love Jesus more?
5. When have you felt your marriage draw you to love the church more?
6. Do you ever feel yourself drawn into autonomy or passivity? When?
7. When do you feel the most loved and cared for by your spouse?
8. When do you feel the most loved and cared for by Jesus?