

The Christian Home

Lesson 2: Marriage as a Picture of Christ and the Church -- Ephesians 5:22–

33

Stand at the back of a wedding for a moment. The music swells, the doors open, and everyone rises and turns. But notice where they look. They do not look at the groom, though he is the one who has waited longest. They look at the bride. All eyes go to her as she steps into the aisle, radiant, unhurried, every head turned toward the one coming to meet her beloved. There is something in that moment that catches even the most cynical heart off guard, a lump in the throat we cannot quite explain. Why does a wedding move us so? Paul would say it is because, without knowing it, we are looking at a picture of something far greater than the couple at the front.

In Ephesians 5, Paul takes the ordinary, daily, unglamorous business of being married and tells us it has been a signpost all along. When a husband loves his wife and lays his life down for her, he is acting out, in miniature, the love of Christ for His church. When a wife honors and supports her husband, she is picturing the church's glad response to her Lord. Marriage, Paul says, was never only about the two people in it. From the very beginning it was pointing past itself, like a road sign pointing down the highway toward a city you cannot yet see.

This changes everything about how we think of our homes. Most of us were handed a small vision of marriage: find the right person, be happy, build a comfortable life. There is nothing wrong with happiness, but Paul lifts our eyes much higher. He says your marriage is meant to preach. The watching world, and your own children, and the neighbors across the fence, are reading a sermon in how you treat each other, a sermon about whether the love of Christ is real and whether His people really do respond to Him in trust. That is a weighty and wonderful thing to carry into the kitchen on a Tuesday night.

So read these verses not as a list of rules to argue over but as an unveiling. Paul calls it a "profound mystery," something hidden for ages and now made known: that the love between a husband and wife was designed by God to display the greatest love story in the universe, the love of the Bridegroom who gave Himself for His bride. Before we ever get to who does what in a marriage, we need to see what a marriage is for. Let Paul show you.

Group Discussion: Most people, if asked what marriage is for, would answer in terms of love, happiness, companionship, or family. Paul gives a far larger answer: marriage is meant to display the relationship between Christ and the church. How might it change the way a couple treats each other day to day if they truly believed their marriage was a living picture of the gospel?

Personal Reflection: Think about what someone watching your home for a week, a child, a neighbor, a guest, would learn about Christ and the church from how you treat the people you live with. What sermon is your home preaching right now, and what would you want it to say?

Read Ephesians 5:22–33

Study Questions

1. Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (v. 22), and he introduces the whole passage with “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21). How does beginning with reverence for Christ set the tone for everything Paul will say about marriage, and why does he tie the way we treat our spouse so closely to our relationship with the Lord?
2. Paul assumes that a Christian marriage will be visibly shaped by reverence for Christ. When an honest observer watches your marriage or your closest relationships, where would they see Christ clearly, and where would they see something that contradicts Him? Name one specific area where you want your relationship to point more truly to the Lord.
3. Paul says the husband is “the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (v. 23). Christ’s headship over the church is the love of a Savior who rescues and gives Himself, not the rule of a tyrant who dominates. What kind of headship, then, does this passage hold up, and what does it rule out?
4. Whether you are a husband, a wife, or preparing for marriage, whose example are you actually following in how you lead or how you respond, the pattern of Christ and His church, or some other model you absorbed along the way? Where do you see the contrast most clearly in your own home?
5. Paul holds up the highest possible standard for a husband’s love: “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her ... so that she might be holy” (vv. 25–27). What does it tell us about the nature of married love that its model is Christ giving Himself on the cross, and that His aim was the holiness, not merely the comfort, of His bride?
6. Christ’s love for the church was costly and self-giving; He gave Himself up for her. Where in your home are you being called to give yourself up, to lay down preferences, comfort, or pride for the good of another? Name one specific sacrifice love is asking of you this week.
7. Paul reaches back to Genesis 2:24, “the two shall become one flesh,” and then says, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (vv. 31–32). How does this connect the one-flesh union we studied in Lesson 1 to the union between Christ and His people, and what does it mean that marriage was pointing to this all along?
8. If your marriage (or your longing for marriage) is ultimately meant to point beyond itself to Christ, how does that free you from asking your spouse, or a future spouse, to be the thing that finally completes you? Where have you been placing a weight on a human relationship that only Christ can bear?

9. Paul calls the union of Christ and the church a “profound mystery” and makes it the very meaning of marriage (v. 32). Why does it matter, both for how we honor marriage and for how we understand the gospel, that God built a picture of Christ and His church into the design of the home itself? What is lost when a culture treats marriage as something it is free to redefine, and what is lost when Christians treat their marriages as merely private arrangements?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from reverence for Christ, to sacrificial headship, to glad submission, to the profound mystery of Christ and His church. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about your marriage or your home as a picture of the gospel that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Revelation 19:6–9, the marriage supper of the Lamb and the bride made ready; Revelation 21:1–4, the new Jerusalem coming down as a bride adorned for her husband; 2 Corinthians 11:2, the church betrothed as a pure bride to one husband, Christ; Isaiah 62:4–5, God rejoicing over His people as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride; Hosea 2:19–20, the Lord betrothing His people to Himself in steadfast love forever