

The Mystery of Marriage

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[0 : 00] The Apostle Paul writes, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.

Because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Father, take your word by your Spirit. Open our minds to understand, and our hearts to rejoice in what you have revealed here.

[1 : 29] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Last week, we looked at this passage, but we began in verse 15 rather than verse 22, where most people begin when they want to read what Paul has to say about marriage in Ephesians.

And I told you last week that the reason that we began in verse 15 was so that we could set marriage within a larger context of God's work of redeeming and saving his people.

And what we saw was that in order to do marriage the way that Paul describes marriage, and in order to aim at the goals that Paul lays out for marriage in this passage, it requires that you be a saved person.

It requires that you know Christ in a saving way, that you be redeemed by him. And not only that you be redeemed by him, but that you be growing in the knowledge of Christ and in his grace. So that verse 15 tells us that we should look carefully how we walk. He tells us later on that we are to be filled with the Spirit, and that filling with the Spirit is the context in which Paul introduces the subject of marriage.

[2 : 37] And so apart from the work of the Holy Spirit within us, none of us will have the kind of marriages that God intends for us to have. And even more importantly, none of us will honor Christ and glorify Christ in our marriages in the ways that God wants us to honor him and glorify him.

But the other thing that we saw last week is that the reason that we need to be redeemed in order to do marriage this way is because we are fallen people. And that what's wrong with marriage in the world today is not simply a straying from vague Christian morality in our culture, although that's a problem.

It's not that we don't communicate well, even though in many marriages that's a serious issue. It's not because we argue about finances or any of those other things that you might find a lot of other people listening, well, if you'll fix this and this and this, then you'll fix your marriage.

It's not ultimately because of those things. The problem with marriage, with your marriage, with my marriage, with any marriage, the problem is that we are fallen, sinful people.

We have broken marriage. I'm not one of those people who has a detailed memory of their childhood. You know, you talk to some people and they can tell you all kinds of stories about their childhood and they remember an incredible...

[3 : 58] I'm not one of those people. Most of my childhood is just a blank canvas to me. I don't know why. I can remember what I read. I can't remember what happened yesterday to me. All right? That's just the way that my brain functions.

But I have a handful of memories as a kid. And I can remember, in particular, one Christmas where I got the toy that I really wanted. And what I really wanted that year was Voltron.

Does anybody know who Voltron is? All right? It's these mechanical cats that transform. And lions. You're right. Thank you, Doug. Resident nerd. All right? Mechanical. Lions. He probably knows all the names of the people who were driving. Don't know. Okay. Thank you. And they sort of transform and they come together to form this big giant robot, Voltron, Defender.

Anyway, I wanted Voltron and I got Voltron and I was so excited about Voltron. And I don't remember if... My memory's bad. I don't know if it's Christmas Day or the day after. But it was not...

[5 : 00] I hadn't had Voltron for long. Playing with him in my room. And immediately the head just snapped right off of it. That was not part of it that was supposed to come apart like the little pieces did.

And I remember just being devastated. And what that taught me was a lesson that I have seen play out throughout my life. And that's that I tend to break things.

A lot of things. Whenever I fix things around the house, I usually break it two or three times before I find the right YouTube video and actually fix what's wrong. That's just the way that it is.

But even that, in a silly way, is a symptom of the fall. Because we all break things. We mess things up. Not just repairs around the house or toys or gadgets and things that we want.

Our lives are broken. And our world is broken. And the reason, as we saw last week, is because of sin. We saw it in the account of the fall itself.

[5 : 59] In Genesis chapter 3, we saw how the fall was precipitated. By a reversal of roles within marriage. So that Adam, rather than leading his wife and protecting his wife, stands there and watches as the serpent tempts her and drags her into sin.

And then Adam does not come to her defense. Even then, he joins her in sin. And God's charge against Adam was that you listen to the voice of your wife. And a lot of men like to take that verse and run with it and say, see, I don't have to listen to you.

But the point of God and the context is, you didn't lead. You weren't the kind of husband that I created you to be. And rather than you leading her, she led you.

And you are at fault, Adam. In fact, the Apostle Paul says it was not Adam who was deceived, but it was the woman who was deceived. In other words, Adam knew full well the sin that he was watching her enter into while she was being deceived by the serpent.

Remember, he received the commandment, not Eve. He was responsible to teach it to his wife. And he failed in that duty, as is clear in Genesis chapter 3.

[7 : 03] So that from the very beginning, the fall of man is bound up with relationships between men and women and how we tend to mess those up. And you don't get very far in the biblical story before you begin to see the repercussions of the fall for marriage beyond the fall itself.

Genesis chapter 4. You only get six generations removed from Adam and Eve to polygamy. Lamech takes two wives.

It's the first instance of polygamy in the Bible. And polygamy will plague God's people throughout the old covenant era. It will harm them in untold ways.

And the heroes of the Old Testament are not immune from fallen, broken marriages. You arrive at Abraham, the father of the faith. And one of Abraham's greatest mistakes that he made in all of his life was that he was willing to try to have a child with Hagar rather than Sarah, through whom God had promised to bring the seed of Abraham.

It was through Sarah. But Abraham, in ignoring that tribe, has a child with Hagar, her concubine. And his marriage after that is filled with strife because of contentions between Isaac and his brother Ishmael.

[8 : 25] Or you move further on to another great hero of the faith. And you look at David and how the infighting in his family that had David himself at times fleeing from the palace in fear for his life from his own children.

And that infighting was the groundwork was laid for that familial infighting because David had multiple wives and had children by different wives. And he didn't do marriage according to God's plan.

And his son Solomon royally messed up. He had hundreds of wives. And the scriptures tell us that Solomon's downfall came when these foreign wives, who he was commanded not to marry, began to bring in their false gods.

And even Solomon himself gave in to the temptation to bow down to idols. And all of that was rooted in Solomon's disobeying of God's word when he married these foreign women.

So the corruption of marriage weaves its way through all of God's revelation. And in fact, you arrive in the Gospels.

[9 : 29] And I want you to turn. Hold your place in Ephesians because we're coming. Coming to Ephesians, I promise. But I want you to turn over to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10.

Where we see that although the issue of polygamy had been dealt with among the Jewish people by the time that Jesus lived and walked upon the earth, polygamy was no longer an issue in Palestine, in the Jewish world.

Now the Greeks and Romans still engaged in polygamy, but by this time it's not a big issue for the Jews. They sort of set that aside. But nevertheless, we still see the corruption of marriage present in the Jewish world.

So that in Mark, chapter 10, Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees in verse 2. It says that the Pharisees came up in order to test him, in order to trick him.

And they said, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? And he answered them, Well, what did Moses command you? And they say, Well, that Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.

[10 : 36] And then Jesus explains why the law of Moses, Why? It's in Deuteronomy, that command is in Deuteronomy. And Jesus begins to explain, Why is that command there?

And he says in verse 5, Because of the hardness of your heart, he wrote you this commandment. But in the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

Therefore man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh, so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

What Jesus is saying to the Pharisees is, Listen, guys, you're at the wrong starting point. You don't understand. God, through Moses, gave commandments to regulate divorce because he knew of the hardness of your own hearts.

That you were going, that your marriages were so corrupt. And so he had to at least manage the corruption within his people, Israel. I just had a question.

[11 : 38] Somebody sent me a question on Facebook this week about the issue of gay marriage and polygamy. And the issue was that they had encountered someone who said, Well, gay marriage should be acceptable today because things are progressing and evolving in our understanding of God.

So in the Old Testament, polygamy was allowed. But under the New Testament, polygamy is not allowed. So you see this advance in God's revelation. And now we've advanced even apparently beyond the New Testament and beyond Christ as apostles.

And they said, How do I respond to that? And so the first thing you understand is that the allowance for polygamy is no different than the allowance for divorce in the Old Testament. It's not according to God's original created order.

He allowed it to happen and even regulated it in the law of Moses because of the hardness of heart of the Israelites themselves. That's why it's there. And everywhere you find polygamy in the Old Testament, it leads to disaster.

Marriage not done according to God's original design in creation always leads to disaster. And that's what Jesus in Mark chapter 10 is telling the Pharisees.

[12 : 47] Guys, you don't understand. You've got it all wrong. Don't try to ask me questions about when and how and why a man can get divorced from his wife. The only reason that Moses gave that commandment was because you're so sinful in the first place.

But go back behind that. Go to the creation and see how God intended it to be. And Jesus quotes two Old Testament passages, both from the creation account. First, Genesis 1.27, where he says there that God made them male and female.

And then the key verse, I think, in understanding everything that the Bible has to say about marriage, he quotes in verse 7, Genesis 2.24.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Understand what Jesus is saying. Because God made man male and female, because he created humanity in that way, because of that, marriage exists.

And marriage is intended to be the union of a man and a woman so that they come together in covenant and they become one flesh, and that one flesh is not divisible by anyone other than God himself, and he severs marriage when death occurs.

[14:01] That's how God ends a marriage. Jesus says, understand, in the beginning, he made them male and female. And understand, he made them male and female so that they would be married and become one flesh.

this is the same verse that we see quoted in our passage here in Ephesians chapter 5. I want you to turn back to Ephesians chapter 5. And really, we are going to spend this morning focused on understanding verses 31 and 32 within the context of the whole Bible.

But here we are, verse 31 of Ephesians chapter 5. It's Genesis 2.24 once again. And he says, therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast or be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

There it is. God's original creation intent. But then Paul adds something that is stunning if you understand what he's saying here.

He says in verse 32, this mystery is profound or literally, this is a big mystery. This mystery is big. This mystery is great.

[15:16] And then he says, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Now, we tend to think of a mystery as something like a mystery movie or a mystery novel in which there is something that we've got to figure out.

As the readers or as the viewers, we're supposed to try to figure out the mystery before the author helps us to figure it out by the last page of the book or by the last couple of minutes of the TV show. In fact, that's the only reason I ever watch any kind of cop dramas. I don't really care about anything. I just want to see, can I figure it out before they tell me and can I figure it out before Allie figures it out? That's my goal if we watch them.

All right? And that's how we think of mystery. It's something that we've just sort of got to get the clues and piece it together and figure it out. Or sometimes, we'll use the word mystery and I often use the word mystery this way.

We'll use the word mystery to describe something that is beyond our understanding. So, if you go through our membership class in the very first session of our membership class, I will talk about the doctrine of the Trinity and what I always tell people is it's a mystery.

[16:21] Don't try to figure it out. Here's all the biblical information. Here's all the data. You add it up. You end up with Trinity. Don't try to figure it out. It's a mystery. It's beyond our comprehension. So sometimes, we use the word mystery in that way.

Neither of those meanings are what Paul has in mind when he uses the word mystery here in this book. Not just in this verse, but throughout this book. What Paul means by mystery is something that God hid, was hidden by God in the past and has now been made known by God in the present or will be made known by God in the future.

So when Paul says this mystery is great, what he's saying is that in Genesis chapter 2 when God brought man and woman together, there was something hidden about it. There was something that did not reveal at that time that he's now made known.

Now there are, if you read Genesis chapter 2 carefully, there are very clear hints that there's a mystery. Okay? So Paul's not coming along and just throwing this on top of the Old Testament and making it up.

If you read Genesis 2 carefully, you walk away from Genesis 2 going, I've got some unanswered questions here. Let me show you. Turn over to Genesis 2. Hold Ephesians 5. Turn over to Genesis chapter 2.

[17:40] Let me see if I can't show you this unrevealed bit of information that you get a clue to that it's there, it exists, but it's not revealed yet this early.

In Genesis chapter 1, actually, if you read through Genesis chapter 1, which we won't do this morning, but on every day of creation, all six days, well, for the first five days of creation, after God creates, he looks at his creation, he says, this is good.

On day six, when he creates man and woman, he says, this is very good. Over and over, it's a refrain that he repeats throughout Genesis 1. Good, good, good, good.

Now, you have that echoing in your mind. If you were a normal reader of a book and you picked up the Bible and you're just reading through the first few chapters of Genesis and you've got that echoing refrain in your mind from chapter 1 and then you read verse 18 in chapter 2, see if this strikes you as strange.

Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. What? The fall has not happened yet.

[18:46] There's nothing sinful in God's creation. Alright? There's nothing sinful about Adam, about the man. And yet, God has repeatedly said, this is good, this is good, this is good, and then literally, verse 18, it says, the Lord God said, not good.

Not even really a verb there, it's just, it's just, not good. And that just slaps you in the face out of nowhere if you're reading it. What do you mean it's, what do you mean it's not good? Well, here's what's wrong.

It's not good for the man to be alone. I'm going to make him a helper fit for him or a helper who corresponds to him. I often talk about men and women being designed in such a way that we, that we fill up with the other lacks.

We are different. We're not the same in that God intended it that way. We are compatible, suitable helpers. Now, you ask the question, why?

Because what becomes clear from Genesis 2, 18, is that Adam is deficient. There's something lacking in him. He needs something else.

[19:55] But he is not deficient because of an accident on God's part, or because God left something out. Adam is deficient by design. It is God's intended purpose for Adam to be incomplete by himself.

This is a part of God's intention in creation. And he will, he will not be complete until you come to the end of chapter 2.

In verse 22, or in verse 23, it says, the man said, seeing you, this is this, at last, remember this, at last, God has brought to Adam all the animals in the intervening verses to teach Adam you're missing something, you're missing something, and Adam says, at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she'll be called woman because she was taken out of man.

And there's the verse, therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Verse 25 sounds weird to modern ears, but what verse 25 is telling us is, it's good again. It's good again. We're back to the refrain. No longer does God pronounce over the man that it's not good. Now God pronounces that you are together and you're not ashamed.

[21:16] It's a good, good thing that's happening here. But we are still left with the question, why God? Why, by your own design, did you make Adam lacking?

Because he didn't have to. Look around at creation. Not everything in creation is coupled male and female. Not everything is. Most of the animals that we're familiar with are, but not everything is. I mean, Nathan and I just went fishing a couple of weeks ago, and when you chop a worm in half, you get two worms. That's the way that it works, right? God could have designed mankind in such a way that it wasn't necessary to have man and woman, but he could have designed it so that the command to be fruitful and multiply could have been accomplished in some other way, and yet he chose to do it like this.

He chose to make Adam deficient and in need of Eve to complete him. And the question that you walk away with is why? And Moses does not answer that in all of the Torah, in all of the law. Genesis through Deuteronomy never answers that question for us. We don't get any answer in the Old Covenant. We get more clues. We get more hints at what might be the reason for that.

[22:35] I mean, we talked about all the failed marriages of the Old Testament, but there are a handful of marriages that follow the biblical pattern.

How about Ruth and Boaz? That's a best love story among human beings in all of the Bible. Ruth and Boaz, how about them?

That's a storybook marriage found in the Old Testament. Or one that's a little less storybook, but nevertheless fulfills God's intention for marriage is the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer.

She's continually unfaithful to him, and Hosea remains faithful to her. He is a good husband. He never abandons her. He doesn't need Moses' regulations on divorce because he's not getting divorced no matter what.

So you have these positive, although Hosea Gomer is positive-negative, but you have these positive examples of marriage in the Old Testament, and I think if we were to zero in on those, we would begin to get some sort of clue about why God designed Adam the way that he designed him. [23 : 42] Because in all of the examples, at least, that I was able to think of this week, where you have a positive example of a marriage in the Old Testament, in every one of those examples, the man in some way prefigures Jesus.

The man in some way points us to Christ so that Boaz is called a kinsman redeemer for Ruth. He redeems his bride. Hosea represents God's patience and his long-suffering with Israel, who is God's own wife and bride, according to the prophet Isaiah.

In Isaiah 54, God says that he will be her husband. And Hosea is the long-suffering groom, just as God suffers long with his people, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, despite Gomer's unfaithfulness, Hosea is faithful to Gomer as God is faithful to his wife Israel.

So that these positive examples, at least of husbands, if not entire marriages, that we find in the Old Testament, all of them end up pointing us ahead to an analogy between Christ and the church, which is exactly what Paul tells us in Ephesians 5.

Come back to our text in Ephesians 5. This is exactly what he tells us. Verse 32, commenting on Genesis 2.24, this mystery, that thing that was hidden in Genesis 2, this mystery is great, and I'm saying that the mystery itself, that it refers to Christ and the church.

[25 : 30] What's the point of marriage? Why? Why would God even make us so that we come together as male and female? Why would he even bother to do that?

And Paul says to us, it's about Jesus. It's not about anything else. It's ultimately about Christ and the display of his glory through our marriages so that our marriages can become dim and faint reflections of the marriage of Christ to his own bride, the church, and what we get gleaned from that is the truth that our marriages are ultimately in God's eyes, they are ultimately successful to the degree that they reflect the relationship that Jesus has with the church and the church has with Jesus.

your marriage is not successful merely because you stay married for 40 years or 50 years or 60 years. That is a great accomplishment, but that doesn't mean biblically that your marriage has necessarily been successful in the most important of ways.

your marriage is successful to the degree that because of your relationship with your spouse, as people look at that, they see something that is markedly different from every other marriage, even marriages that by the world's standards are good and great marriage, they see something markedly different about our marriages and what's different about our marriages is they reflect Jesus.

marriage is ultimately about the gospel. It's not about whether or not you at home can navigate all the pitfalls.

[27 : 20] It's not about how well you can get along with each other on a day-to-day basis. All that's important. Don't get me wrong. But it's not ultimately about those things. It's about the gospel.

It's about the display of the glory of Jesus in laying down His life for His bride. Take a look at what it says in verse 25 here.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Marriage is meant to display that sacrifice.

And then on the other hand, in verse 22, wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church's body and is Himself its Savior.

So that from both the man and from the woman, our responsibilities in marriage are on the part of the man to reflect Christ's relationship with the church and on the part of the wife to reflect the church's relationship with Christ.

[28 : 26] And when both are doing that, the world will see something that does not quite make sense to them that they will not agree with. They will not on the surface like the way that we conduct ourselves in marriage because if you even utter the word submit outside of sort of a church kind of context, people get angry about it and they read all these things into it.

They won't like on the surface what they hear in us and see, but beneath that they will see something that they are envious of because we are still made in the image of God.

We're still made male and female and despite the fall and despite our depravity, the image of God remains and there are within us, I believe, still deep groanings for the original creation, intents and purposes of God.

Fallen as we may be, unable as we may be, apart from the grace of God to attain to God's original intended purposes for us, there is still within us a deep-seated longing to get there.

That's why people try to earn God's favor through their own merit and their own obedience because there is deep within the human heart this desire even in the midst of rebellion to somehow get back to where we originally were.

[29 : 44] And the good news the gospel is that God wants to not only restore to us his original intention for us in creation, he wants to take us far, far beyond that.

Far beyond it. So that on the last day, when Christ returns, and he has the great wedding feast and the great banquet there described in Revelation chapter 21, on that last day, we won't be married anymore.

Allie and I will no longer be bound by the covenant of marriage on that day. none of you will be bound by the covenant of marriage that you have in this life because death will have already severed that. But on that day, we will be so swept up into a greater marriage and a better union with Christ that everything we've experienced here will pale in comparison.

The paradise of Eden pales in comparison to the new heavens and new earth described in the end of the book of Revelation. And our marriages ought to do two things in order to honor Jesus.

They ought to point back while we're in this life. They ought to point back in the way that we conduct ourselves to God's original intention for marriage at creation, which Adam and Eve violated and passed on that violation.

[31 : 09] We should be pointing back in the way that we conduct ourselves in marriage, and then we should be looking forward to the day in which we are all taken up into the greater union of Christ with his bride.

And when we do those things in our marriage, when we begin to focus on those things, and we begin to aim at those things, and all the things that divide us, all the things that would tear asunder our marriages begin to fade into the background, and they just don't matter anymore.

Finances are not as big a deal in your marriage. When you're aiming to glorify Christ in everything you do as a couple, and as a family, in fact, because you're aiming to glorify Christ, you'll begin to do things with your money that honor him as well, and it becomes less of an issue.

Because you're aimed at the same goal, and because you understand your respective roles in marriage, the communication issues, while still present and bubbling up at times because we're sinners, they will begin to fade and melt and become much, much less.

Over there, but they fade. So the issue in marriage is ultimately whether or not we will so look to Christ and so desire Christ and so want his glory displayed in us that we're willing to lay down all of our other expectations, all of them, and aim at him.

[32 : 42] you cannot do that. You cannot do that apart from a relationship with Jesus because you can't aim at the great wedding banquet of Christ.

If you're not in Christ now through faith, you don't get to be a part of that. You can't walk according to the instructions of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 5 unless you're walking in the way that honors the Lord and filled with his spirit so that he empowers you and enables you to do things that quite frankly are against your sinful nature and desires.

You must be redeemed. You must be filled with the spirit and you must in all that you do in your marriage aim at the magnification of Jesus in it.

Let's pray. It feels like a lofty and tall order when we describe it that way. But Father, we know that your will for us is our sanctification and that you sent your spirit to live within your people for that very purpose.

So my prayer for us as a congregation is not that we'll get everything right in marriage but that we'll be more holy. That your spirit will work in our hearts this week and even this morning.

[34 : 09] And that we'll begin to walk in greater obedience in greater joy in the presence of Jesus.

So that these things don't seem so lofty but they seem like the natural outworking of an intimate relationship with Christ in a life empowered and led by his spirit.

I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.