

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today we're going to talk about marriage and what we'll learn today is of profound importance. It has tremendous bearing on our lives, our society, our children... but most importantly, our relationship with God. While all sin is equally offensive to God, not all sin does the same damage here on earth. Sins related to marriage do considerable damage. Like a rock dropped in a pond, the ripples often rock many people, and sometimes even the next generation or more.

I say this up front so that everyone will see the need to listen to this today. The danger in talking about marriage is that those who are single will feel this doesn't apply to them and tune out. But there is at least a chance you single people will get married someday, so you really need to hear this before you do. And even if there is someone here who, for whatever reason, is pretty confident they will never get married, you have friends and relatives who are. You may need to speak this wisdom of God to others to help them in their marriage. So let's dive in.

There is so much confusion in our modern society about what marriage even is, what it's for, why you would get married, etc.

It's important to remember what came earlier in the book of Ephesians so we get the context. Paul has already preached the Gospel. And it's important that we keep it in the front of our minds as well as we consider the verses before. The truth is that we are much worse than we think or could ever imagine. You can never clean up your life. No amount of self-effort can do it. *You're worse than you ever imagined.* We are blind to our shortcomings, faults and failures. In our minds we paint a picture of an alternate reality in which we are the hero, and we are always right. We buy into our own lies and believe we're not that bad, and God must be fairly satisfied and pleased. But God says to us bluntly: You are worse than you ever imagined. *But it also says that you are much more loved than you could ever imagine.* You are God's ultimate treasure! And he treasures you so, that he offered his Son as a perfect sacrifice for you. If we see things as God reveals them in Bible – that is, if we see things the way they really are – then we will be humbled more, and at the same time affirmed more as we become confident in God's undeserved love.

So you become a person who doesn't seek affirmation in others. You already have affirmation in your heavenly Father. Knowing who you are and what he's made of you, you are humble and you are eager to serve.

Now, just before the part we are going to read, Paul has just been talking about being filled with the Spirit. And what does that look like? Well, he talks about worship and encouraging each other with the Word. He talks about having a heart of thankfulness.

And then he says this: Here's what an spirit-filled heart looks like when it comes to marriage. I'll read it all, then we'll take a closer look.

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^[a] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”^[b] ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Premise

v.21: Submit to each other...

So what Paul is describing is a subheading under "what life in the Spirit" looks like. It's a living reality that effects every aspect of your life. (Last week we talked about radical discipleship. Radical discipleship is the result of being filled with the Spirit. Today we look at what radical discipleship / being spirit-filled looks like in marriage and through marriage.

V.21 says that one of the effects of the Gospel is that you grant submission where it is due. The sinful man says, "Me first." But the one filled with the Spirit recognizes that Christ gave himself first for us and forgave us. His selfless, yielding spirit dwells in us, and so we recognize the human authorities God has given, and the order he has established, rejoices in the order of society, and yields to those who have it. Then Paul starts with perhaps the most important place where God has established authority: in the home.

And so here is

The leadership in the marriage is given to the man. True leadership means bearing additional responsibility for something. ILLUSTRATION: I'm sure you heard about the fiasco at **Volkswagen**. Their diesel cars were rigged to fool EPA pollution testers. When the car sensed a test, it would retune itself to emit less pollutants. When not being tested, it pollutes up to 40 times more than when it's being tested. Blatant dishonesty and disregard for the rules! So about a week after all of this was revealed, the CEO of Volkswagen resigned. Why? Did he design the cars himself? No. I doubt he is even an engineer. But as the head of the company he is the one ultimately responsible for the fact that these cars were sold with this "feature." So he resigned. So God designed marriage so the man is the leader. And that means he is ultimately responsible for the state of the marriage and the family. He will primarily answer before God for an unhappy marriage, unruly children, inability to meet his families physical needs, etc. With leadership comes responsibility. Frankly, it's responsibility I would rather not have many times... I would be happy if my wife were ultimately responsible before God for some of the things that may go on in our home. But I am - and that's God's design.

Many find these words offensive. But I would suggest they are only offensive if you don't fully understand it.

I think some of the pushback comes from people who don't understand the word "submit." That word has many negative connotations in English. What it means for the husband to lead and the wife to yield to his leadership... to acknowledge the created order of the husband's leadership.

1. **Man and woman are equal before God.** There is no order of importance. Both are equally sinful and equally saved. Both men and women were worth the sacrifice of God's Son.

2. Paul presupposes that both are believers... that **both are spirit-filled**. As we will soon see, God's design for marriage only properly and truly works where both husband and wife know the Lord and his love, and have a spirit-filled desire to conform their lives to his will.

Women, don't you dare trust a man this much unless his heart has been transformed by the Spirit.

3. **What does the leadership of the man look like really?** While the principal is given, a description of what it looks like is not. Does it mean the husband should make all the decisions? The Bible doesn't say that. Does it mean he will manage the finances? The Bible doesn't say that either. Where are the details? There aren't any. Two spirit-filled people, entering marriage, each seeking to follow God's plan and order in marriage, agreeing to follow God's plan and allow the man to bear the responsibility while both work together in the marriage and family... they will be able to work it out between themselves.

Purpose. Why do people get married?

Used to be a *business or political proposition*. Marriage was to help your family's station and security. Today? For *personal fulfillment*.

Bible says both are wrong. Purpose: Gospel reenactment. God gave it as a way to see in real life between two live human beings and example (though imperfect) of the church's relationship to Christ. *The Church's one foundation Is Jesus Christ her Lord, She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her And for her life He died.*

The gospel! He sees we are shadows of ourselves. Ruined by our flaws and self-centeredness. He takes what is ugly and unloveable, and makes us lovely. When you love somebody, you don't want to see them flawed and broken. You want them to be better. So Christ loved us so much he took away our flaws, our ugliness, and he fixed us. He lived for us. He died for us. He rose again. He imputed upon his bride, the church, exactly what she needed to be holy and perfect and beautiful. Even though she didn't deserve it. And he doesn't stop there! Not only does he declare us beautiful in God's sight, he also daily works in us so that our lives conform more and more to God's standard of beauty. So our words make God smile. Our loving actions bring him pleasure. Our very thoughts and attitudes are just what God wants. Jesus loves us too much to see us continue on in a life of sin. He redeems us. Then he begins his work in sanctification in us too!

Jesus comes into our life with a vision of **who we could** be... not who we are. He knows that covered by his shed blood, and empowered by his Spirit we can become something extraordinary. Motivated by that love for who we could become, he sacrifices all for us and for our good and our transformation! He selflessly gives all of himself for our benefit, never asking what is in it for him!

In Christian marriage, the **husband and the wife do the same**. They unconditionally love each other. They don't see the person as they are, but they see them for who they can become with God's power and his spirit working in them. The Christian spouse loves in spite of *who the other is and what the other did or is currently doing*. They each desire only what is best for the other. They desire only to help make the other the very best version of the other that God wants them to be. They live and work and move for the benefit of the other, and not for self.

To do this requires us to do **the opposite** of what our sinful nature naturally does. And Paul, I believe, highlights the very two ways each spouse is most likely to fail in Christ-like love for the other. **Wives**, yield to your husband and respect him because of the authority and responsibility God has given him in your marriage. That's hard for you, isn't it! He often does not deserve such respect.

He often leads poorly. He has bad habits. Yet God calls you to do Christian love and service by fulfilling your God given role in the marriage - yield to your husband's authority.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That's hard. Unconditional. Self-sacrificial!

REVIEW: So what is the wife to do: And all the men call out "Submit to their husbands and show them proper respect as the leader." Men, be quiet. The question wasn't for you. Those instructions were not give to you to impose upon your wife and to remind her of every day. They were given to your wife for her to ponder and apply.

So, what is the husband to do? And all the women call out: "Love your wives as Christ loved the church, sacrificing yourself for even - even your very life if necessary! Women, be quiet. The question was not for you. Though your answer was right, the instructions were not give to you to impose upon your husband and to remind him of every day. They were given to your husband for him to ponder and apply.

And so the perfect Christian marriage would be where the husband reenacts every day with his wife the role of Christ to his church. He

The perfect Christian marriage would be where the wife reenacts every day with her husband the role of the church to her groom, Christ.

Our culture: look for the most together person, most attractive, most rich person... for my own benefit and happiness. An **exchange** relationship / **consumer** relationship. Think **grocery store**. You go to a certain grocery store all the time and maybe their friendly and maybe they know your name. But you got there finally because they have good products at a good price. But what happens if another grocery store opens, and it's a little closer, and it has better products at a better price. You're switching grocery stores. Your relationship with your store is an exchange relationship / consumer. They offer products you need, and you have a relationship with them because it's best for you. That's exactly how many view marriage. They start the marriage and will continue in the marriage because they are getting something they feel they need. And if it should happen that they are no longer getting what they want or need out of the relationship, or if it starts to cost too much, or if someone else comes along who is closer and gives more of what I want with less cost to me, well I'll start the new relationship. And isn't that the definition of an affair? Someone else has come along who is closer (many, many affairs are in the work place with co-workers), they give more of what I need (companionship, attention, sexual attraction, affirmation) at a cheaper price (I have very little commitment. I don't have to pour much effort at all into this relationship.) There are affairs only because people look at relationships as a commodity / exchange / as a consumer. The relationship is not most important. Your personal needs are most important. It's to say, "*I'll meet your needs but only if you first need my needs. If you stop meeting my needs, I'll stop meeting your needs.*" This is an inherently selfish view of marriage which will not help your relationship with God, your prospects for eternity, or your development as a kind and generous person.

Godly view: Covenant relationship. The relationship is more important than your individual needs. I'm going to put their needs and their advancement ahead of my own. "I will meet your needs even if you don't meet my needs. I will be the spouse I am supposed to be even if you won't be the spouse you're supposed to be. Covenant. Committed. Unconditional. Just like God's covenant relationship with us.

"That doesn't sound fulfilling." Try it and you'll see. There's nothing more fulfilling than two people being in a relationship in which each one is not seeking personal fulfilment but the thriving of the other. And what you find is that is the most fulfilling way to live!"

The Ultimate thing... is not marriage

So if I do these things my marriage will be the greatest thing in the world? NO! Marriage cannot ever be the greatest thing in the world - that's not what God designed it for. He is the greatest thing in the world. Verse 32: This is a profound mystery: but I'm talking about Christ and the church. All of this talk about marriage is basically pointing to SOMETHING ELSE: The mystery of Christ and his Church.

If we make marriage the ultimate, we doom marriage. It cannot stand that kind of pressure. "If I just find Mr. Right, all will be great." Wrong!

As we reenact the relationship of Christ and his church in our marriages, we are also reminded constantly of what the most important thing is. It is NOT your marriage. Yes, in this sermon on marriage, you need to understand that the most important thing in your life is NOT your marriage. The most important thing is your identity in Christ Jesus. In most marriages today, people enter into thinking the marriage is the most important thing in life. They look to marriage to give that which only God can truly give. They think that if they just find the "right one" then they will have true happiness, genuine fulfillment, they will have clear identity. These are things only God can provide!

The ONLY way to get this is to first have a relationship with Christ. To understand him and his love. To know his sacrifice for you. As we grow in our relationship to Christ, we are better and better illuminated and empowered to love our spouse. Imagine if every Christian marriage was one like Paul describes here! What a testimony it would be of Christ's love... to our families, friends... and to the world. What peace and joy and encouragement we would have in our marriages. This would ripple out into society as well.

Gospel reenactment: That is the purpose of marriage.