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## Christ and His Bride

### Ephesians 5:30-33

**Intro:** In his address on the subject of submission, Paul rightfully begins in the home and we have discussed the reasons for this in a previous study. But, if you have been a Christian for some time, you have probably read this passage multiple times over and may have even heard it preached from the pulpit a time or two so that it has become so familiar that it kind of just blends into the wallpaper of Paul's letter. This is understandable but if true, it does the text a great disservice. In his commentary on Ephesians, William Barclay noted that no one reading this passage in the 20th century can fully realize how great it is. He goes on to point out that over the years the Christian view of marriage has come to be accepted. Even though our Western world obviously fails to live up to God's standards for marriage we all still accept them as proper. But when Paul wrote these verses, the Christian view of marriage was new and radical.

Of the 3 ancient cultures into which the Christian Scriptures were written—Hebrew, Greek, and Roman—Hebrew culture had the highest ideal of marriage. This is to be expected because of the theological continuity between God's revelation in the OT and God's revelation in the NT. Still, at the time of the writing of the NT the Bible's proper ideal of marriage had been undermined and virtually destroyed. At the time of Christ a Jewish woman was not a person but a thing, little more than property. A woman had no legal rights whatever, and a wife could be dismissed at will.

There were 2 schools of thought on the matter in Israel at that time. One group stated that a man could divorce his wife if he found something indecent about her (NIV) meaning adultery alone. The other group took a more "progressive" approach in defining indecent as anything that might displease the husband, even spoiling his dinner. The 2 views were worlds apart but since either was a recognized possibility, it is easy to see which view prevailed.

Plus, a woman had no right of divorce and a man could divorce simply by giving his wife a bill of divorcement: a simple written statement that he had divorced her. The result was that marriage was so much in danger in Judaism that Jewish girls were refusing to marry at all because their future

in the home was so uncertain.

If the state of marriage was on perilous ground in Judaism, it was on even worse ground in Greek and Roman cultures. In Greece a married woman had no part in a man's life. She was not even a true companion to her husband. She was to run his home and care of his children. A Greek husband was expected to find companionship elsewhere. Rome was the sewer of the ancient world. For the first 500 years of the Republic divorce was unheard of. But at the time of Paul, women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. The Historian Jerome tells of one Roman matron who was married to her 23<sup>rd</sup> husband, and she was his 21<sup>st</sup> wife. Sexual perversions were rampant, and licentiousness was so widespread it had become the norm.

Barclay's assessment was, "It was against that background that Paul writes. When Paul wrote this most lovely passage he was not simply restating the view that every man held. He was calling men and women to a new fidelity and a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life. It is the simple fact of history that no one in this world with the single exception of children . . . owes more to Christ than women. It is impossible to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity had on ordinary everyday home life in the ancient world."

Yet the interesting thing about this text is that it doesn't seem as if Paul thought he was unfolding a newer, higher, and purer view of marriage than had been known before. In fact, I think he would've denied it. Barclay says Paul was "calling men and women to a new fidelity and a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life." But Paul, if he were questioned on this, would have said at best that he was re-calling them to this standard.

The reason for this is that Paul knew he didn't get his ideas of marriage from some special, new revelation of God but from the OT, in fact, from the very earliest chapters of Genesis. In v31 he quotes [Gen 2:24](#) specifically. Paul's saying that his teaching is based on this and other parts of the OT revelation, not on some new revelation or worse, on some insight peculiar to himself or other apostles. The true historical order is not a progression from pagan or merely inadequate views of marriage to higher views. It's really: first, the high standard; second, a falling away from that standard; third, a recalling to that standard through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's view is

grounded in the original orders of creation.

In truth, it goes back even further than that. [Rev 13:8](#) speaks of Christ having been “slain from the foundation of the world.” This wonderful truth has great spiritual ramifications; meaning that in God’s mind spiritual things came before all material ones and, thus, everything was created to illustrate some spiritual truth. It didn’t make any difference what it was—whether the sun and moon, a blade of grass, a snowflake, a lamb, a horse—whatever—God created it to illustrate some spiritual truth that existed in God’s mind prior to creation.

This applies equally to marriage. When God created marriage it wasn’t just that God considered marriage to be a good idea, though it certainly is that, or even because God thought it would be a good way to have and rear children. God created marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church. The relationship of a husband to a wife in marriage was going to illustrate the relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ to those he would one day redeem from sin’s slavery. The relationship of a wife to her husband was going to illustrate the relationship the people of God, the church, would have to Jesus Christ.

This is why the name of Christ occurs again and again throughout this great passage ([22-32](#)). Notice the repeated alterations between Paul’s discussion of the marriage relationship and that of Christ and the church. Of course, Paul’s whole point was to address the former in establishing a biblically based household code for the church but which actually comes first in the mind of God: clearly the relationship of Christ to the church is more important and marriage, while also very important, is merely the illustration of it.

But if this is so, then several important conclusions follow: 1) No one will ever be able to understand the truest, deepest meaning of marriage who isn’t a Christian. If a husband is to love like Christ, it only stands to reason that he must first know the love of Christ in order to fulfill that commandment. If a wife is to submit to her husband as she submits to Christ, she must first have submitted her life to Christ in order to properly understand what this means.

2) The meaning Paul’s exhortation in [2 Cor 6:14](#) about being unequally

yoked becomes clearer. If one partner is a Christian and the other is not, a husband and wife can't possibly have the same ideals for their marriage. 3) No marriage will ever attain its true potential unless the 2 who are united in the marriage are pursuing it according to God's goal and standards. In every area of life believers are to "trust in the LORD with all our hearts and lean not unto our own understanding." Only when we pursue marriage according to God's standards will God make our paths straight and bring blessing.

**30** – Here, Paul brings the analogy back in a circle. First, the relationship between Jesus and the church spoke to us about the husband-wife relationship. Now the marriage relationship speaks to us about the relationship between Jesus and His people. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time the church is identified as the body of Christ. It first occurred in v29 but its 2<sup>nd</sup> mention underscores the reason why Jesus provides and cares for the church – because it is His body! He will provide and care for His body just as a husband provides and cares for his own flesh, instead of hating it.

Still, this reference to the body of Christ alludes to some level of diversity within the unity of the body. The phrase we are member of His body reveals that the body is made up of individual parts that make up the whole. Just as 4:11-16 draws attention to the unity and diversity within the body, with various parts working toward the healthy function of the whole, so here we are reminded that the body of Christ consists of each individual believer connected to Christ and every other believer through their union with Him.

**31** – This is a nearly-exact quotation from the Greek version of the OT and is generally regarded as the archetypal biblical statement on marriage so its inclusion here is not surprising. But **Gen 2:24** isn't cited here simply because of its authority and status; it also serves 2 other purposes. First, it gives a theological grounding to the idea expressed in v29 that a wife is her husband's own flesh, since it states that a man and his wife will become one flesh. This oneness of flesh can be understood in a physical sense, in relation to sexual union, but it should also be understood in emotional and spiritual levels as well.

As such, a man and woman are to be united to each other in marriage as they can never be united to anyone else, not even their closest friends or family. Nor is there any other closeness in life that is comparable. Of course, what this verse doesn't mean is that wives have somehow become their

husbands or vice versa. [Gen 2:24](#) doesn't mean to imply that 2 people are now 1 person. Rather, they are to enter into a deeply connected relationship that involves the mingling of their bodies, minds and spirits.

When God made the first man and the first woman He made them in His own image which means, among other things, that He made them a trinity as He is a trinity. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In a similar way, man is a trinity of body, soul and spirit. The union of one man with one woman in marriage is to be a union on each of these 3 levels. It must be if the marriage is to attain to God's design for it and be lasting.

It must be a union of body with body, first of all, which is to say that there must be a valid sexual relationship. This is a vital part of marriage. According to the Bible, neither the man nor the woman is to defraud the other of the sexual experience. Sex must be a regular expression of the relationship. On the other hand, if the relationship is based solely upon then the marriage is weak and is headed for the divorce courts. When the glamour wears off, as it always does if there is nothing more to sustain it, the relationship is finished. Such a marriage is based purely on physical attraction and ends in either indifference, divorce, or adultery.

A good marriage is more than a union of body with body. It is also a union of soul with soul. The word "soul" refers to the intellectual and emotional side of a person's nature, involving the characteristics that we associate with the mind. Thus, a marriage that involves a union of souls is a marriage in which both share an interest in similar things and try to establish a parity of sorts, both intellectually and emotionally. Such marriages will last longer. This isn't to say that you both may still retain many differences but if you want a biblical marriage, you'll strive to work towards this union.

A true marriage must be a marriage of body with body and of soul with soul but it must also be a marriage of spirit with spirit. For this reason the only marriages that can approximate the kind of marriage that God intended to exist in this world are Christian marriages. What does it mean to have a marriage of spirit with spirit? Mainly it means that both the husband and the wife must be Christians, for the unsaved person possesses a spirit only in the sense that he supports a vacuum at the center of his life that can only be filled by God. He has a spirit, but the spirit has died—just as Adam's spirit died when he disobeyed God and ran from Him. The only people who



possess a live spirit are those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit and have entered into God's family by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only these can be married in the full sense of the word, which means body with body, soul with soul, and spirit with spirit. In this type of union a man and a woman experience the fullest measure of earthly blessing and most fully illustrate the mystical union of Christ and his church.

**32** – The second purpose for quoting **Gen 2:24** is to reflect the mysterious union between Christ and the church. The 2 relationships are uniquely interconnected; what's generally true of one is generally true of the other. This is true in regard to the pattern of the first man and the first woman. As one author put it, "the woman was originally made as the result of an operation which God performed upon man. How did the church come into being? The church came about as the result of an operation God performed on the 2nd Man, His only begotten, Beloved Son on Calvary's hill. A deep sleep fell upon Adam. A deep sleep fell upon the Son of God, He gave up the ghost. He expired, and there in that operation the church was taken out. As the woman was taken out of Adam, so the church is taken out of Christ. The woman was taken out of the side of Adam; and it is from the Lord's bleeding, wounded side that the church comes." (Martin Lloyd-Jones)

But, it is also true in regard to the pattern of marriage in general. The biblical husband-wife relationship shows us that Jesus wants more than just an external, surface relationship. It shows us that He wants us to be one with Him. It shows us that there is a sense that Jesus is incomplete without us. Adam was incomplete without Eve; thus, we can say that Eve makes up the fullness of Adam, makes up that which was lacking in him. That is exactly what the church does for Jesus as **1:23** declares of the church, that it is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. There's a common connection of unity and oneness within each of these 2 relationships.

Of course, the first part of **Gen 2:24** reveals the fundamental principle for promoting oneness in marriage: there must be a leaving (of former associations) and a cleaving (joining together as one). This reminds us of another significant implication of the marriage relationship: it establishes a new family unit. While not completely forsaking his parents, the man now forges a new primary allegiance with his wife. Their new relationship is now the center of a new family that will be built around them and through them.

**33** – Nevertheless – Having alternated several times between the husband-wife relationship and the relationship of Christ and the church, Paul now turns his attention back to addressing household marriage. Clearly, the overall intention of this passage was to address the domestic situation of believers, even though considerable attention was given to Christ and the church. Paul opens with a word that is also translated as however, or to sum up or simply just but and each use carries the idea of braking off a discussion and emphasizing what is important in the text. Paul may have thought he was getting off topic and so brings the discussion back to its original audience and sums it all up. So, this is a summary verse that calls husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands.

Paul then identifies his target audience: let each one of you... There's no hiding or excusing yourself out of this one and we can say this about all the teaching on marriage. It's easy to see yourself as just not being that sort of person so you know you'll never do well at it. Husbands do it by saying, "I'm just not very loving." Wives do it by saying, "I'm just not the submissive type." But, no matter what our natural dispositions are, we have a target to shoot for and Paul's directive here means we all should set our eyes and hearts on the target the Bible reveals to us.

husbands – Again, Paul stresses the unity a husband must recognize and allow to shape his thinking and actions. Unity is the central principle of marriage and it is exactly because so many in our modern world have never had any concept of what is involved in marriage, from the standpoint of unity, that they're riding so loosely into it and breaking their vows and pledges. This is why divorce has become one of the major problems of our time. Couples have never caught sight of this unity, they're still thinking in terms of their own individuality. So, you have 2 people asserting their own rights and thus, you get clashes, discord and separation.

The husband has been given the position of dignity, leadership and of headship. If he understands what these things mean then he will never abuse his position; he'll never misuse it by being too harsh, dictatorial, unkind or unfair. To be guilty of such behavior is a denial of the marriage principle and means there is an absence of the Spirit in his life.

wives – Here, Paul directs all Spirit-filled Christian wives to respect their husbands. Respect is a wider category than submission since it can be

expressed when submission is not appropriate. So, it is possible to respect without submission but it is not possible to submit without respect. This is not a rebuttal or denial of v22. Submission there is merely an expression of respect. Respect is the primary obligation for wives, but submission is simply one way to put respect into action.

We must each allow our particular principle to guide us and not expect the other party to adhere to their God-given principle while we slack off on ours because of disagreement. In God's economy, our agreement to God's directives is not required, just our obedience. The supreme thing is always to consider our Lord Jesus Christ. If a husband and wife are individually considering Jesus Christ as not only their Lord but as their pattern of life, then you have no reason to worry about their relationship to each other. It will be rock-solid.

When we think of Christ and His relationship to the church, we generally think of the simpler and even more wonderful fact that He loved us and gave Himself for us. We recognize that this is to be our pattern.

In the OT we're told of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer which from the beginning was set forth as an illustration of the way God loves and gives Himself for His people in spite of their unfaithful behavior. Gomer was like us. She was married to Hosea, but she was flirtatious and soon left him for another man. Hosea made sure that she had food to eat and clothes to wear—even when she was living with another man. But at last Gomer sank so low that she was sold as a slave in the city of Samaria, and Hosea was told to go and buy her. He bought her for “fifteen shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley” (Hos 3:2). At this point Gomer became Hosea's property; he could have killed her if he wished. But he didn't kill her. He loved her! And now, since she was his again, he promised love for her and claimed her love for himself.

This is a picture of the way the Lord Jesus Christ loves us and of how our marriages are to illustrate that great and prior relationship. We are the adulterous slave, sold on the auction block of sin. He loved us when we did not love him. He died for us when we were scorning His love and running from Him. Still, He bought us by that greatest of all sacrifices, and we became his. Peter says, “You were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pt 1:18-19). Having



become His, we now owe Him the fullest measure of love.

Never make the mistake of dragging your understanding of the love of God in Christ down to the level of your own weak love. Rather let God draw your love up by the love and power of Christ to His standard. Then Christ shall have His way, and you will be able to testify to the world of His great love.

