

“Marriage: The Foundation of a Home”

Ephesians 5:22-33

Take your Bible this morning and turn with me to the book of Ephesians, chapter 5. Last week, I began a six-part teaching series on the home stretching from Mother’s Day to Father’s Day. I want to spend some time addressing the most fundamental relationships we have with one another. Our closest relationships are found within our own homes, parents to their children, children to their parents. More fundamental than this, however, is the relationship that exists between husbands and wives. If the home is the basic building block of society, then marriage is the basic building block of the home. Before children came along, God brought Adam and Eve together as man and woman and the two became one flesh.

Some years ago, there was a Pew Research and Time Magazine survey that asked the American public if marriage was becoming obsolete. An astounding 40% of respondents said yes. Among those in the traditional marrying age range (18-29), the number was four points higher at 44%. This same survey, “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” recorded a number of other shocking statistics about the deteriorating state of marriage and the family in our nation. For instance, in 1960, 72% of all adults and 68% of people in their twenties were married. Fast forward 50 years, and those numbers had dropped to 52% and 26% respectively.

Given the current state of affairs in our society, it is obvious that the concept of marriage and family that most people have nowadays is in contrast to God’s design. Things are serious when four-in-ten people agree that the most basic institution of society is becoming obsolete and antiquated. Our culture’s departure from divine design merely shows what has been true from the

beginning—sin has affected every part of human life. And marriage is no exception. It has not come under attack in our society all at once. It has been under attack since a serpent slithered into God’s garden and claimed to offer something better.

Because of sin, marriage is a challenge. It takes work and is not easy no matter what age you are.

David Jeremiah — *“The story is told about a couple who were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. When the festivities ended, the woman turned to her husband and said, ‘You know, we’ve been miserable for 50 years. We’ve fought every day, we’ve disagreed on nearly everything, and I’m convinced that we can’t keep going like this. I’ve made a commitment that I will pray that God will help us solve this problem. I’m praying that He will take one of us home. And when He answers my prayer, I’m going to live with my sister!’”*

Marriage is difficult, and that’s why the divorce rate is so high. Divorce is one of the most prevalent and widespread problems in our culture today, and this is even true within the church. I’ve heard that as many as 8 in 10 people have been either directly or indirectly affected by divorce. For many people, the mere mention of this subject is a painful reminder of wounds from the past and brings up memories and feelings that they’d rather forget.

Yet the fact remains that marriage is under attack in our generation. Why does marriage seem to be in so much trouble today?

Christianity Today — *“...marriage is in trouble today because society and the church have a faulty view of it, a deified myth of this human, delightful, yet flawed institution. Though fertility gods have been dethroned by the advance of Christianity, today’s culture seems to be resurrecting them in a more palatable*

form. Most voices today laud a romantic image of marriage as life's ultimate true source of joy. What is the result? The result is a crash, thousands of crashes. In reality, every marriage faces conflict, misunderstanding, broken dreams, and bruised egos. Any real marriage held up against the yard stick of total joy will measure short. And if relationships that are meant to give total joy fail, the lives of the people who are in them are often shattered."

Young people get married with an illusion of what they think marriage is—no conflict, problems, or disappointments. Or that it is all about you getting your needs met. God has a very different idea of marriage, one that is not focused on getting. Instead, it is focused on giving.

The root of our problems is found in the statement so often made when someone decides to get married—"I've found someone to make me happy." In reality, marriage is not ultimately about making ourselves happy. It's about making someone else happy. It's about finding someone you can devote your life to serving. In many ways, the modern understanding of marriage has been trivialized to nothing more than a shallow relationship that dissolves when romantic feelings give out.

There is no relationship in life that carries more potential for closeness and intimacy with another human being than marriage. Yet at the same time, there's no relationship that carries a greater potential for conflict. The phrase 'battle of the sexes' exists for a reason. Marriage is a relationship between two imperfect people. Left unchecked, sin in the heart reeks havoc in the home.

We turn now to Paul's letter to the Ephesian church...

When Paul first came to the city of Ephesus on his second missionary journey in 53 AD, he didn't stay there very long. Approximately two years later, he made it

the base of his outreach in Asia Minor. Acts 19 says he ended up staying there for more than two years. By the time he left, he had established a strong and vibrant church. Nearly 10 years later, he wrote this epistle to them from Rome. Though the letter is addressed to those in Ephesus, it was more than likely intended to be circulated throughout all the churches in the region. The city of Ephesus was known for its idol worship. The temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located in the city. It was an elaborate structure and an engineering marvel that was held up by 127 pillars. It was perhaps the first building in history to have been built completely of marble. Not only was it devoted to the worship of the goddess Artemis, but it was also a depository for wealth which made it sort of the 'central bank' of Asia.

Now, all of this is significant because in the six chapters that make up the letter, Paul describes the church as being a temple for the Holy Spirit. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. He says we have been given 'unsearchable riches' in Christ. Such vast wealth has been deposited into our account and is accessible to us.

Like most of his letters, the first part is doctrinal and the last part turns to the practical. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, the apostle describes the believer's wealth. In chapters 4-6, he describes the believer's walk. To say it another way, the first half of Ephesians focuses on what we have been given in Christ. The second half points to the practical ways our lives should reflect what we have been given in Christ. We inherit spiritual wealth by faith, and we invest that wealth by obedient living. We must draw on these resources as we seek to build godly marriages and families.

This morning, I intend to introduce this text from Ephesians 5 and make three general observations about marriage. When we consider what Paul writes about marriage in these verses, notice first that it involves:

1—A PURPOSE to live for

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church...”

The passage that extends from verse 22 through verse 33 is perhaps the longest treatment in the New Testament on the subject of marriage. It is part of a larger passage that deals with the Christian’s relationships within the church, in the home, and at work. The gospel fundamentally changes everything in a person’s life, including our relationships.

Before we examine the roles and responsibilities of wives to their husbands and husbands to their wives, we need to take a step back and consider what marriage is. We need to keep before us the fundamental purpose that God has in mind in it. Marriage is reflective of the purpose and design for which God created human society to flourish. We go all the way back to the beginning verses of the Bible. You will notice that this is what Paul does in verse 31:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

He is quoting directly from Genesis 2:24 and the passage where God creates Eve from Adam’s side and gives her to him as a companion. This same verse is referenced at least four separate times throughout the New Testament—Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7, 1 Corinthians 6:16, and here in Ephesians 5:31.

Paul is making an appeal to God’s original design.

The first chapter of Genesis provides us with a panoramic view of creation, while the second chapter gives us a more focused and intimate description of creation that centers around the first human couple, Adam and Eve.

- we are made for a reason

After having created the world and everything in it, the crown of creation is humanity made in the image of God. The Lord creates a man out of the dust of the earth. He breathes into him the breath of life. Man and woman are created with a uniqueness that sets them apart from anything else that God makes.

Genesis 1:26-27—“Then God said, Let us make man in Our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping things that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.”

God is the ultimate artist. When He created the universe, He left His own mark on it in such a way that the heavens themselves declare the glory of God. The sky shows forth His handiwork. All of creation around us testifies of the beauty and grace and power of the Creator. Humanity, however, is solely made in His image.

There is a theological term, ‘Imago Dei,’ which is a Latin term to describe the uniqueness of humanity among God’s creation. We are made in the image of God, which means that we are made with a unique capacity to reflect the character of God. It means that we have been formed for relationship with God, that we are to bear witness of God.

God is an intelligent and moral being, and we also are moral agents equipped with a mind, a heart, and a will. This makes it possible for us to mirror and reflect God's holiness, which was God's original intent.

When Adam fell, something happened to distort the image of God in man as sin entered the picture and corrupted our moral faculties. Only Jesus Christ can restore it!

Without God, there is no basis for right or wrong. The intellectually honest atheist knows that he has a problem here. The atheist who denies the existence of God says that you can do what you want with no fear of retribution. However, once you dispense with God, you lose all intellectual basis for declaring anything to be right or wrong.

To say that something is right or wrong is to be objective. You have to have a standard to compare it to. In order to say that something is against the design, you have to know what the design is. If the universe is nothing more than randomly colliding materials, there cannot be any design or purpose, and thus no right or wrong.

There is something within us that knows this is not right.

Psalm 139:13-14—“For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.”

- we are made for responsibility

Notice what Genesis 2:15 says:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

The Hebrew words used here for 'work' and 'keep' are also used to describe the responsibilities of those who served in the Tabernacle later on in Israel's history. Some have suggested that they can be translated as 'worship' and 'obey.' The idea is that man was created to honor God with the work of his hands.

Man has been created to find fulfillment not in idleness and laziness, but in a life of rewarding labor in obedience to God's command. Sin's curse meant that Adam worked by the sweat of his brow. He'd often have nothing to show for his labor but thorns and thistles. Work was never a part of the curse, though it has been affected by it. Responsibility was instituted before the fall of man and is part of God's design for our lives.

Work and accomplishment is a good thing, inasmuch as it does not become a 'god' thing. Like everything else it touches, sin corrupts our work. Now, we work by the sweat of our brow and watch as the fruit of our work decays and fades.

We are made for a reason, we are made for responsibility, and then notice also that:

- we are made for relationship

When you read the first two chapters of the Bible, the phrase, 'it was good,' is descriptive of everything that God made. However, there was only one thing that was not good. God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone."

Therefore, God determined to create a helper who would be suitable for the man, someone who was like him in every way, but also different.

"Helper" — *entails his inadequacy vs. her inferiority*

Taken from Adam's side, God formed Eve from one of his ribs. The woman is in no way inferior to the man, but is a suitable companion and partner for him. She complements him and makes up for what he lacks.

Man and woman are equal, but different. She is not taken from his head for her to rule over him, nor is she taken from his feet for him to trample over her, but she is taken from his side as his equal but altogether different partner. Her femininity is distinct from his masculinity.

So it is God who performs the first marriage in the garden of Eden. It is this same design for marriage that Jesus upheld:

Matthew 19:4-6—“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his 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.”

In other words, don't let man mess with what God Himself has manufactured. The design in which God intended the human family to function is not subject to redefinition. And yet we know that sin marred God's design for marriage and the home. We see early evidence of this in the Scriptures.

Genesis 4:19—“Then Lamech took for himself two wives.”

We must not confuse what the Bible reports with what it endorses. When the Bible reports men with multiple wives, it is merely stating the facts. Bigamy, polygamy, and other human inventions were never part of God's design for marriage. God's design involves one man and one woman who come together as one flesh.

Before I move on, I do believe that it is important to point out something here. One of the ideas of our time is that if you are not in a relationship, you can't be fulfilled. Your life is somehow 'less than' if you are single. This often creates great pressure for people to identify with other people and seek their worth from others. There are those who have a call from God to singleness, and that's okay. Your worth as an individual comes from Christ and no one else.

2—A POWER to live in

"...be filled with the Spirit."

We often miss the important context that overarches these instructions that the apostle Paul outlines for marriage and the family. We jump to the commands themselves and we overlook the very important truth from which they arise. It is within the context of life in the Spirit that Paul is writing. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that our home and marriage can be what God wants it to be. Christian marriage always involves three parties—a husband, a wife, and Almighty God. And the key to a successful Christian marriage involves being filled with the Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit refers to His control and empowerment in the lives of believers to enable us to live the Christian life.

When you see these instructions for marriage given in the context of a Spirit-filled life, they will take on new meaning for you. The power we need to establish a godly home is not left up to us. God has already given to Christian husbands and wives the tools and the resources they need to walk together in harmony. It is simply a matter of you and me appropriating those resources and consciously yielding to the life of the Spirit within.

If you go back a few verses, notice the urgent appeal:

Ephesians 5:14-17—“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

The Holy Spirit must control our lives so that we wake up spiritually, we become wise spiritually, and we stop being foolish spiritually. God gave us the Holy Spirit because He knows something we tend to forget—it is impossible to live the Christian life on our own. If you could, you wouldn't need the Holy Spirit. His power would not be necessary.

John 15:5—“Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus didn't say that we can do a few things, or even that we need His help. The Christian life is a supernatural life, which means we need supernatural ability to live it. And the only thing that makes you more powerful now than before you were saved is the presence of the Spirit.

1 John 4:4—“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

There is a greater power at work in you as a believer than anywhere in the world. It is not a matter of you trying your best and letting the Holy Spirit make up the difference. Rather, it involves you daily dying to self and making the conscious decision to walk in the fullness of the Spirit. Our failure to understand this is what makes up for 99.9% of the problems in Christian marriages. Too full of ourselves!

James 4:1—“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”

Selfish desire is the number one culprit behind marital conflict. It reminds me of an epitaph a man had etched on his tombstone:

*Beneath these stones do lie,
Back to back, my wife and I!
When the last trumpet the air shall fill,
If she gets up, I'll just lie still.*

Some couples live and die at odds with one another. Why such conflict? It is because of who is in control. Selfish people will always be at odds with others in their lives. The focus of their heart is getting and not giving. When I am in control, it is a disaster. But when I'm under control, I have access to a power that enables me to do all things. That is why conflict in marriage almost always results from a heart that is self-directed rather than Spirit-controlled. And when self insists on its own rights, then peace will be elusive and absent. The self-centered life is always in a battle for the top. It pushes others down as it insists on being first. The Spirit-filled life, however, lifts others up as it is willing to be last. It is the attitude of Christ as described in Philippians 2 where the Bible says, "Let this mind be in you..."

3—A PRINCIPLE to live by

"...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ...as to the Lord...as the church submits to Christ...as Christ loved the church."

Notice that here within all of these verses, the apostle Paul presupposes that believers are living and abiding under the authority of Christ. Our authority on the issue of marriage is the Word of God. A believer who is living in submission to the authority of Scripture will have no problem with these commands given to husbands and wives.

If you go back one verse, you will discover that submission is to be characteristic of every relationship. We all have an obligation to be humble and submissive. Verse 21 says we are to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

“Be Subject” — *military term meaning to rank under*

The idea is the Spirit-filled believers rank themselves under one another rather than exalting themselves above one another. The main idea is that of relinquishing your rights in favor of another. You will remember what Jesus said to His disciples as they were arguing back and forth about who was the greatest.

Matthew 20:25-28— **“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”**

The man or woman who is filled with the Spirit doesn't insist on being first, but is willing to rank themselves under another. Such an attitude is to be reflective of all of our relationships within the church. And notice in verse 22, this principle is carried into the marriage relationship. It is to characterize every relationship we have. And in chapter 6, Paul will conclude with a general call to arms by reminding us of the nature of spiritual conflict. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Alistair Begg — *“And that is clearly seen in the agitation on the part of the evil one to encourage us to take what God has given for our good and for His glory and to pervert it in such a fashion that the beauty and the wholeness and the*

enjoyment of that which God has made for our good is lost in the pursuit of selfish pleasure.”

Our culture is rotten to the core when it comes to this. I am not surprised that it is. If on one hand I look at the Bible and then on the other I look the culture, I am presented with conflicting ideas. I look at Scripture and see the design of God, and then I look around in society and see the departure of a culture. Why? By nature, humanity is in rebellion against God. Rebellious humanity says, “I don’t like this idea, so I have another one that I am going to substitute in its place.” It is impossible for society to go down that road without it having an impact in all these negative ways which we are now seeing.

A breakdown in the home will inevitably lead to a breakdown in the culture. Ours is the generation of broken marriages, broken homes, broken lives. Such is the way it has been in the world since man fell into sin and disobedience.

With that said, there is a bigger elephant in the room. The issue that is most alarming to me is not that a contrary view to God’s design exists outside the church. That’s to be expected among those who do not know and worship our God. I’m more concerned that these contrary views are beginning to exist inside the church. Within our Christian circles, those who profess to believe the Bible are now for whatever reason prepared to tamper with the Bible, to readjust the Bible, in order to accommodate the thoughts and popular viewpoints of the day. The real question is, “Does the church believe the Bible?” Many who profess Christ have placed themselves above the Scriptures rather than under the Scriptures.

Augustine — *“If you believe what you like in the Scriptures and reject what you don’t like, it is not the Scriptures that you believe but yourself.”*

We've allowed the world to influence our thinking on the most basic relationships we have in the home. Even within the church, men and women are more prone to get their relationship advice from the magazine rack while standing in line at Wal-Mart than they are the holy Scriptures. The Bible doesn't present us with advice. Rather, it presents us with authority that is binding on our lives. Frankly, I'm not at all concerned with how the culture around us views these issues. Neither do I expect an unbelieving world to get it right. I do, however, expect the church of the living God to have a totally different attitude. We must not trust our own minds above the mind of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is speaking to the Ephesians as fellow Christians, and the principles that he outlines here in this fifth chapter find their power and effectiveness only in the fear of Christ. A family can only be what God has designed it to be when the members of the family are functioning in the way God designed them to be. The image of God is restored in man only through the Lord Jesus Christ! The number one goal for every wife and for every husband is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Perhaps a fitting question to ask yourself is this—"Am I in submission to the authority of the Bible? Am I filled with the Spirit as a Christian wife, as a Christian husband?"

We shouldn't really be surprised when a world that rejects our Savior also rejects His standards. Christ's standards of ethics cannot be understood or appreciated by anyone who doesn't know Him as Savior and Lord. The world around us doesn't agree with what the Bible says about marriage because it doesn't agree with what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. I could spend a whole lot of time giving you bullet points for marriage. We could spend time talking about love languages and his/her stuff. And all of that certainly has its time and place. But

most important to me this morning is whether or not your life is submitted to the authority of the Bible, and whether or not you as a person are filled with the Holy Spirit. A tender, submissive spirit is essential for any progress in the realm of our relationships, be it in marriage or in the home or the church or wherever.

If a wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord, that means she first must know the Lord. If a husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, that means that he must first know Christ. It is only as Christ is foremost in my heart and life that I can be the husband, father, and man that God wants me to be.

Ask yourself:

- Am I born again? Is there evidence in my life of personal salvation?
- Am I submitted? Do I place myself above or under the Scriptures?
- Am I filled? Have I yielded my life today to the Spirit?