

## Title: “Of God and Marriage”

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Ephesians 5:31

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**Service Readings:** Is. 29:11-19; Eph. 5:22-33; Mark 7:1-13

*We explore the biblical purpose of marriage and how we live within it.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The Western world will tell you that marriage is all about love: two people, maybe even more, find each other, experience deep feelings of euphoria and joy towards each other, label it as love, and decide that they want that experience to continue. And so they marry. Of course, once those feelings wear off and are replaced with the feelings of normal life, and normal relationships, they sever their relationship and go their own ways, searching for the next euphoric experience.

Around the world we can find cultures who have different purposes for marriage: social status, continuity of family lineages, and the like, but by and large, the most prominent one, at least here in the United States, is love. People marry for love.

What about Christians? How would *they* define the purpose of marriage? How would *you* define it? Would you reach back to the creation story and quote scripture?

<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Did God introduce marriage so that we could have help with our daily tasks, or is it something more? You see, *how* you understand the purpose of marriage greatly influences *how* you understand what Paul is stating in his letter. If you view it through the lens of love or social status or even companionship, this passage, especially the one about wives and submission, is concerning. But if you understand *why* God created marriage then you view this passage with a deep sense of love and encouragement. And so, the first thing we should do is figure out God’s purpose. Only then can we explore and more fully understand what Paul is describing. And if you are not married, don’t tune me out because there is a message in here for you, also!

So, what *is* the purpose of marriage? Timothy Keller, a well-known pastor, now with the Lord, once defined marriage this way. He stated, and as near as I can quote, “the purpose of biblical marriage is to serve your spouse with a vision for future glory. It is to say, ‘I see something glorious that God is doing in you. I believe that I am both attracted and called to enable that process. And that is where I want to go. That is what I want to do. I find in myself a passion to make myself useful to you and to the one working in your life.’”

You see, what Pastor Keller is holding up is a picture of marriage that reflects the purpose of Jesus coming to earth. God saw something glorious in his creation – a creation that was actively rebelling

against him. He saw that his creation was very good and he wanted to save it. And so he sent his son into the world in order to do exactly that. And in obedience to the father, his son, Jesus, served us. He submitted himself to this act of service all the way to the cross where he took upon our sins and suffered our punishment. Is it no wonder that Paul describes this relationship in terms of Christ as the head and his church as the body? We are intertwined, joined, in a way that only marriage can even begin to express. And even if you are not married, our relationship with Christ is described in a very similar way in other areas of Scripture.

And so when man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife, when the two become one flesh, it is not for any selfish reason but for selfless ones. It is because of your desire, one might even say, your vocation, to aid your spouse in their life of sanctification. And to do this, it means giving up your own freedoms, setting aside your own desires so that you can serve your spouse. It means holding back nothing – your money, your time, your emotion, .... Everything in service to him or her.

So, if God's purpose for marriage is to support and encourage their life of sanctification, what does that look like on a daily basis? The answer to that question is what brings us back to Paul's letter. I'd like to start just a few verses back because of the way that the ESV translation seems to separate verse 22 into a new sentence. So, starting in verse 19:

be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,<sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,<sup>22</sup> wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Wives, Paul says, should submit, but not in an earthly sense. Instead, he connects this action with the Holy Spirit and Christ. Be filled with the Holy Spirit, he writes. Give thanks to God the Father, and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. What he is saying is that this is not a worldly definition of submission. And, more importantly he is *also* acknowledging that it is an act that can *only* be accomplished with the help of the Holy Spirit. And it is an act not of weakness or surrender but of cooperation, for according to Paul, husbands are to

<sup>25</sup> ... love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,<sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,<sup>27</sup> 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.

See? Just as Christ gave himself up completely for us, husbands are to do the same for their wives. They are to empty themselves of their own desires and turn all of their attention on sanctifying her so that she can be presented to God in splendor! That is very much submitting to her as much as it is loving her.

This is what Paul means in his letter. Husbands and wives are to become one flesh and in doing so, serve one another. Each has a complimentary role to play but they are both equal, both powerful, and both necessary. And, the only way they will realize success is if they lean on the Holy Spirit, for marriage without him is nothing more than worldly.

"Now, I know what many of you might be thinking. 'Pastor, that sounds wonderful, but it's not how I approached my marriage.' Or maybe, 'I try, but I fail at being selfless more often than I'd like to admit.' Let me assure you, you're not alone. The beauty of God's design for marriage is that it's not about perfection, but direction. It's about gradually growing together towards this ideal.

Let me share a story. There was a couple, let's call them John and Mary, who approached their pastor because they were feeling discouraged about their marriage. They argued frequently and felt disconnected. The pastor talked about this Biblical model, and they decided to start small. John began by simply asking Mary each morning, 'How can I serve you today?' At first, it felt awkward, even a bit forced. But over time, it became a habit, then a joy. Mary, seeing John's efforts, began to respond in kind. Their marriage didn't transform overnight, but it started moving in a new direction."

"OK," you say. "Sounds like something I can do, but Paul sets the bar extremely high and I'm not sure that I can reach it." I hear you, but remember, just as our justification is by grace through faith, so too is our sanctification – including our marriages. God doesn't expect perfection but he does invite growth.

Here is a practical way you might start: This week, try to catch your spouse doing something right. Instead of focusing on shortcomings, actively look for moments when your spouse is serving you or others. Acknowledge it, appreciate it. This simple act can begin to shift your focus from self to other, mirroring Christ's love for the church.

When I was preparing for this sermon I thought of Peter walking on water. He had the right idea, stepping out in faith, but he sank when he lost focus. Our attempts to live out this Biblical marriage might sometimes feel like that - noble in intention, but a bit wobbly in execution. The key is to keep our eyes on Jesus and keep trying."

Marriage is not something you do alone, nor is it something you do only with your spouse. Marriage includes God – specifically the Holy Spirit. And it is he that will guide you towards the model that Paul speaks about. And really, this advice extends beyond just marriage – it is really the message for all members of the church – let the Holy Spirit guide us to mature in our faith so we can become bodies sanctified and presented holy to God the father.

After all, we are members of Christ's' body.

Let us pray.

We thank You for the gift of marriage and its profound purpose in our lives. Help us to see our marriages, and those of our brothers and sisters in Christ, as reflections of Your love for the Church.

For those married, grant them the strength and wisdom to serve their spouses selflessly, always seeking to build each other up in faith and holiness. Fill them with Your Spirit, that they may submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

For those unmarried, guide them to support and encourage the marriages around them, offering wisdom and accountability as members of Your body.

May all of us, married or single, grow in our understanding of Your love and sacrifice for us. Help us to live out our vocations in ways that glorify You and advance Your Kingdom.

Amen