

- CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE • EPHESIANS 5:22-33; GENESIS 2:18-25

MAIN POINT

A healthy, Christ-centered marriage reflects the gospel to the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What do you think are the most significant differences between men and women?

How do you think sin has corrupted these differences?

Why do you think God created us with prescribed roles in marriages?

Which natural tendency of your gender do you have the most difficulty handling in a godly way within the context of your home? Why? What affect does this have on your marriage?

There are many things that husbands and wives can both do equally well, but there just some things a husband can do well and with joy that his wife prefers not to do, just as there are things that a wife can do well and with joy that her husband prefers not to do. Each person in a marriage has specific roles to play that are for the good of both spouses and for the glory of God.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:22-24.

From this passage, what other relationship is a marriage symbolic of? In what ways?

How would you define submission? Why does the word tend to stir up controversy?

What does true submission look like? What does it not look like?

How does the church submit to Christ? Wives, how might this help you submit to your husbands?

Submission doesn't imply losing your sense of worth or self. It is a voluntary and loving choice to follow in a way that displays how Christians follow Jesus. Christians don't submit because someone forces them to do so; they submit voluntarily. Wives weren't forced to think of themselves as their husbands' property. They could see themselves as his partner and receive from him sacrificial love.

What value does a passage like this have for you if you aren't married?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:25-33.

Who receives more instruction in Ephesians 5, wives or husbands? Why might this be?

What does the love husbands are called to model look like?

Husbands, what is the best example that comes to mind of a time when you have loved your wife like Christ loves the church?

How might a wife respond to a husband who loves her like Jesus? How does this type of love benefit her spiritually?

How does a relationship centered on sacrificial love and submission reflect the gospel? How can you and your spouse keep these ideas as a common part of your marriage?

Though Ephesians 5 is often quoted to remind women of their struggle of submission, it is the husband who actually receives the greater challenge from God. She must submit. He must love with the love of Jesus. It is clear though that each action serves the other. The wife, in submitting, encourages her husband to Christ-likeness and the husband, in loving like Jesus, makes it easier for the wife to submit.

How can embracing roles in marriage as God designed them help create a strong and healthy friendship?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 2:18-24.

Why do you think God referred to Eve as a “helper” in verse 18? What does this tell us about the purpose of marriage in God’s kingdom?

How would you characterize the relationship between Adam and this woman? Between God and man? What makes this kind of fellowship possible?

The creation of the man left creation incomplete. The man was alone, which was not good. He needed someone to whom he could relate and with whom he could fulfill God’s will, so God created the woman as a helper for the man. Helper refers to someone who supplies what another lacks. While the woman would be like him, she also would be different. The man did not need another person exactly like himself. The woman’s strengths complemented his own and allowed them together to accomplish God’s commands.

Why do you think Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 in his instruction on marriage? What basic aspects of marriage are noted in verse 24? Why is each one important?

How does zealously clinging to each other strengthen a marriage?

Genesis 2:24 expresses God’s original intention for marriage: spouses rely on each other to meet their needs. The one-flesh relationship involves all areas of life: physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional. The mystery of how two individuals join together to fulfill their roles in marriage parallels the relationship between Christ and His church.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What elements do you believe are vital to a good, godly marriage? Which of these needs the most attention in your marriage? What is something you can do to focus on it?

How can living out God’s marriage ideals be difficult? In what ways can it be rewarding?

What is something you can do this week to show love and respect to your spouse? To someone in your family?

PRAYER

Ask God to strengthen the marriages in your church based on the truths of His Word. Pray that marriages would reflect the submissiveness and sacrificial love God desires spouses to show each other.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 5:22-33

5:22-24 Paul knew that both male and female are equally created in God's image, equally recipients of salvation by grace through faith, and of no fundamental difference in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). The phrase "to your own husbands" reminds us that Paul did not expect each woman to submit to any and all of the males in the church. On the other hand, the verb submit is quite strong, expressing the idea of "follow the leadership of." This term suggests an organization in which different roles are assigned in order for the group to succeed. (In an army, if soldiers do not follow the leadership of the general, chaos will follow and battles will be lost.) For Christian wives to submit to their husbands, then, is for them to acknowledge their God-assigned role for the success of their marriage. Paul provided an incentive for this submission by the phrase "as to the Lord." On the basis of their personal relationship with Jesus—and their obedience to Him—wives were to submit to their husbands. He viewed this as an act of service to Christ. Of course, Paul was not implying that Christian wives are exempt from seeking to follow Christ directly as they develop their own personal spiritual lives. Paul had taught earlier in Ephesians that Christ is the Head of the church (1:22; 4:15). Here, however, he made a comparison that he had not made before. There is a parallel between the role that Christ has as Head of the church and the role that the husband has as head of the wife. Moreover, the essential characteristic of Jesus' headship is not so much dominating as it is delivering: He is the Savior of the body. His headship over the church is that of care more than control. Husbands can never be the saviors of their wives in the same way that Christ is their Savior. Yet Paul implied that wives who see their husbands exhibiting sacrificial care will have no trouble submitting to their leadership. Both husbands and Christ have been called head (or leader). Both wives and the church have the responsibility to submit to their leader. The phrase in everything implies that all areas of life are included in the wife's submission. Yet surely Paul would have considered it unthinkable for a wife to submit to a husband's asking her to do something immoral or ungodly.

5:25-30 The words translated "love" and "loved" are forms of the verb (Greek, "agapao") used in John 3:16 for God's sacrificial concern for the world. Such love is more than mere affection or emotion; it includes actions based on care for the object of love. Although many husbands have literally died for their wives (and vice versa), Paul's focus is more on the responsibility of the husband to live for his wife than to die for her. These verse provide the theological foundation for understanding a husband's responsibility to his wife. To make her holy describes what happens now (in this lifetime) to believers as a result of Jesus' self-giving. Everything in our

conversion as well as in our daily Christian living has as its goal setting us apart for Christ. Paul explained this as an experience of cleansing. The image of washing helps us understand what being holy means. To present the church to Himself describes what will happen (throughout eternity) to believers as a result of Jesus' self-giving. The verb "present" suggests a bride on her wedding day approaching her beloved groom, and the phrase "in splendor" hints at the bride's wedding attire. No bride would want to appear on her wedding day in a spotted, wrinkled gown. The words "holy" and "blameless" sum up the effect of Christ's love and sacrifice for His people. And the Lord will most certainly accomplish this result in His people, for holy and blameless are the same words used to describe God's plan for His chosen ones from the foundation of the world. Christian husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ does. This means they are to do all they can to make their wives more beautiful (in the spiritual sense of being holy and blameless). Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. A husband is the head; the wife is the body; and the husband loves his body. It is as if their wives were an extension of their own bodies. When the apostle wrote that he who loves his wife loves himself, he used the verb "loves." Just as a man should seek his own spiritual welfare, so he should seek the highest good of his wife. The husband seeks the highest good of his wife in the physical realm as well. God has so wired us as human beings that a person provides and cares for his physical well-being. The normal pattern of life is for a person to take care of his own physical body. For a husband, this includes the responsibility of caring for the body (wife) to whom he is married.

5:31-33 A couple's unity is based on recognizing that previous family ties are to be reprioritized after marriage. Husbands and wives are intentionally to leave their parents, the human relationship that normally dominates the life of children. This leaving includes emotional and spiritual separation from one's parents too—and likely physical and financial separation as well—so that the marriage relationship can be primary. If leave puts the matter negatively, then be joined puts the new relationship positively. Be joined could also be translated "united to" or "bonded with." The two will be one flesh includes the intimacy of sexual union, but it extends to all other dimensions. The husband and wife are to be united in their values and decisions as they join together emotionally and spiritually. Here Paul returned for a moment to his doctrinal reflection on Christ and the church. It was no mystery that husband and wife join together as one flesh. That teaching went back to Genesis. The mystery was that the redeemed and the Lord Jesus are joined together in one body, which a godly marriage reflects. A godly, "one-flesh" marriage visibly models the one-flesh relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom-Head) and His people (the bride-body). Then the apostle offered one final word for each spouse within a marriage. In summary, a husband's responsibility is to love his wife as himself. This is the third time in the passage that Paul urged husbands to love their wives. The wife's responsibility is to respect her husband. This verb is different than "submit," which Paul had used earlier. The verb

rendered respect is usually translated “fear.” Yet here it refers not to a sense of terror but to the high regard a wife expresses for her husband, who sacrifices and serves her so that she may become holy.

| GENESIS 2:18-25

2:18-23 The theme of God providing for Adam’s needs is picked up again here, as God declared that Adam’s being alone is not good. God created the man with a need to relate to one as his complement, and now God will meet that need. Adam’s understanding of the nature of the animals he named only highlighted the differences that existed between him and the rest of God’s creatures: no helper was found as his complement.

At what must have been a moment of loneliness in Adam’s life, God stepped in to create one who would perfectly meet Adam’s need. Because God took one of his ribs to use as His raw material, the woman would correspond perfectly—though not identically—to Adam. Like Adam, the woman possessed God’s image. Adam’s first recorded words express his delight with God’s handiwork and his recognition of the unique suitability of God’s last recorded creation in the creation accounts.

2:24-25 God’s timeless design for marriage is declared here. The one flesh relationship certainly involves sexual union, but also includes a husband and wife coming together in spiritual, mental, and emotional harmony. Because the devastating effects of sin had not yet ravaged nature or humanity, there was no need for clothing. Adam and Eve could live without the barriers needed to shield them from their environment and each other without a sense of shame.