

Marriage: God's Masterpiece of Creation

Ephesians 5:21-33

There is an old legend from India about the creation of man and woman:

When He had finished creating the man, the Creator realized that he had used up all the concrete elements. There was nothing solid, nothing compact or hard, left over to create the woman.

After thinking for a long time, the Creator took the roundness of the moon, the flexibility of a clinging vine and the trembling grass, the slenderness of a reed and the blossoming of flowers, the lightness of leaves and the serenity of the rays of sunshine, the tears of clouds and the instability of the wind, the fearfulness of a rabbit and the vanity of a peacock, the softness of a bird's breast and the hardness of a diamond, the sweetness of honey and the cruelty of a tiger, the burning of fire and the coldness of snow, the talkativeness of a magpie and the singing of a nightingale, the falseness of a crane and the faithfulness of a mother lion.

Mixing all these non-solid elements together, the Creator created the woman and gave her to the man. After one week, the man came back and said,

“Lord, the creature you have given me makes my life unhappy. She talks without ceasing and torments me intolerably, so that I have no rest. She insists that I pay attention to her all the time and so my hours are wasted. She cries about every little thing and leads an idle life. I have come to give her back to you, because I can't live with her.”

The Creator said, “All right.” And He took her back.

After a week had passed, the man came back to the Creator. “Lord, my life is so empty since I gave that creature back to you. I always think of her—how she danced and sang, how she looked at me out of the corner of her eye, how she chatted with me and then snuggled close to me. She was so beautiful to look at and so soft to touch. I liked so much to hear her laugh. Please give her back to me.”

The Creator said, “All right.” And He gave her back.

But three days later, the man came back and said, “Lord, I don't know—I just can't explain it, but after all my experience with this creature, I've come to the conclusion that she causes me more trouble than pleasure. I pray Thee, take her back again! I can't live with her!”

The Creator replied, “You can’t live without her, either!” And He turned His back on the man and continued with His work. (As retold by Walter Trobisch in *Love is a Feeling to be Learned*.)

It certainly doesn’t seem like it at times, but marriage, as God originally intended it, is God’s Masterpiece of Creation. It does not seem to be the masterpiece of creation when we hear so much of divorce. If we were to take a poll this morning, we would probably discover that there are very few families who have not been touched by the trauma of divorce. But from the very beginning, when God first united a man and a woman in marriage, God’s original intention for marriage has been perverted. As God originally intended marriage, it is a visual proclamation of the Gospel! In our day it has become increasingly more important for Christians to go back to the Bible as their authoritative guide for living.

This passage in Ephesians is but one of many references in the Scriptures where the relationship between God and His people is compared to the relationship a man shares with his wife. For example, over and over again the church is referred to as “the bride of Christ.” Today, we’re going to be a little more specific and apply this to the subject of marriage.

Allow me a few moments here to make a few personal comments. I can only imagine a few critics speaking with each other, wondering what was going to happen when we came to this passage on marriage. Would I, one whose first marriage failed, continue on through this passage, or would we suddenly begin somewhere else? That’s one of the aspects of preaching through a passage of Scripture—that is, that you have to take it as it comes, even if the subject is one you would rather avoid.

There may be some thinking right at this moment that I am the least qualified to be speaking on the subject of marriage, and what God intends for marriage. “Who is he,” you may be thinking, “to say anything at all on the subject?” Let me say out loud for the record that should that be the criteria we use for preaching from this pulpit, then we would never mention gossip, or bitterness, or anger, or lust, or greed or any other type of sin, for I am guilty of all of them! So I preach from this passage today, not because I have done it perfectly, but because I am a sinner—a sinner who wants to make sure that you do it better than I have, a sinner who has repented and who is trying with his whole being to be successful this time around. And should you be as honest, you will admit that we should all approach this passage on our knees in humble repentance, because while you may not have gone through a divorce court, your marriage may still be far from what God intends for it to be.

Nothing else in all of creation so adequately pictures the relationship between Christ and the believer. Nothing else, in all of creation, dramatizes so well the love and intimacy and faithfulness God shares with His people. There are four important lessons about our relationship

with the Lord which are visualized for us in a God-ordained marriage. What does marriage teach us about our relationship to God?

1 Marriage teaches us the unity God desires to have with His people.

Ephesians 5:31 reads, *“For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”* The truth of that verse is so important that this verse is found four times in the pages of Scripture: Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:15; Mark 10:7; and here in Ephesians 5:31. But the key to understanding verse 31 is found in reading verses 30-32 as a whole.

Verse 31 begins, *“For this reason...”* For **what** reason? For the reason given in verse 30: *“For we are members of His body.”* We are all united in the Body of Christ, and for **that** reason, a man and a woman are to leave their homes and be united with each other. Their unity pictures the perfect unity of the Body of Christ!

Then in verse 32, Paul goes on to say, *“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”* There it is, as clearly as it could be said! The unity that a husband and wife experience—or are intended to experience—is a picture of the unity God desires to have with His people! Paul expressed that unity in Romans 6:5 – *“If we have been **united** with Him in His death, we will certainly also be **united** with Him in His resurrection.”* This unity is brought about and is made possible by the shed blood of Jesus, but marriage pictures for us the beauty of our being united with Christ.

If you are having trouble in your marriage right now, it may be because you have violated this important principle. Are you united? When the Bible speaks of the man and woman becoming one flesh, it’s talking about more than just the physical relationship. It refers to the uniting of the total personalities of the two people involved. It is referring to an intimacy that is so deep and so enduring that the physical aspects of that relationship are only a portion of the overall bond between them. Or, if you are having difficulties in your marriage right now, it may be because one or the other of you never learned the importance of what God says here when we read, *“a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.”*

Before you get married, ask yourself, “Can I see myself being totally united with this person? Will the two of us be able to totally bare our souls to each other, without fear of judgment or reprisal?”

2 Marriage teaches us the intimacy God longs to have with His people.

What a beautiful thought this is! At **creation** we were created male and female. Our sexuality is a part of God’s original intention. It was not added on later as an

afterthought. When we treat sex as a hush-hush subject we overlook one of the greatest truths about God's relationship with His people.

For instance, in Genesis 3, we have the story of how Adam and Eve both disobeyed God. They sinned, and what was the first thing they did? They saw that they were naked, so they took fig leaves and covered themselves. And what was the second thing they did? They hid from God. They first hid from each other, then they hid from God. Their open, honest, intimate relationship with God had been destroyed, and so had their relationship with each other. Things would never be the same again. Gone forever was the openness and intimacy God had originally intended for them, both with Him and with each other.

The husband-wife sexual relationship is used throughout Scripture to symbolize the intimacy God longs to have with His people. Throughout the Old Testament the Hebrew word meaning "to know," referring to the physical relationship of husband and wife, is the same Hebrew word used when the Bible refers to a man "knowing" God! The intimacy a husband and wife share with each other is one of life's greatest pleasures, yet it becomes greater still when you realize that it pictures the intimacy God longs to have with His people.

Think about the Song of Solomon, particularly chapter five. The bride in that book says, *"My beloved is dazzling and ruddy....His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs; his lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh...His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable...Let his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me."* The groom responds to his bride, *"How beautiful you are, my darling...Your eyes are like doves...Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes...your lips are like a scarlet thread...your neck like the tower of David."*

Now, men, in our day you might not get very far with your sweetheart using those kinds of images. She might even think you were insulting her! But they meant something in that day; these were very romantic words he was using. You might try using this phrase the groom used in the Song of Solomon: *"You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes."*

They were talking about more than just holding hands! Yet their relationship symbolizes for us the intimacy of the relationship God longs to have with His people!

If you are having trouble in your marriage right now, it may be that you have disregarded this principle of Scripture. Ephesians 5:28 tells us that *"husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."* It's difficult to get much more intimate than that! Is there true intimacy in your marriage, on all levels of your relationship with each other? If not, that may be the root cause for the bitterness and strife in your home. When one partner withholds himself or herself from

the other, either physically, emotionally or spiritually, it is a violation of the original intention God had for a peaceful, happy marriage.

Before you get married, ask yourself, “Can I see myself being totally intimate with this person, on all levels?” You see, total intimacy is God’s original intention for marriage, because it demonstrates our intimacy with God.

3 Marriage teaches us the faithfulness God expects from His people.

It is so important that Christians are called back to the teachings of God’s Word! If we say we believe, why is there so much unfaithfulness in marriage? How can we say we believe and yet continue to disobey God? God’s Word clearly teaches us that adultery is wrong, by any stretch of the imagination. We modern-day thinkers have rationalized and reasoned and excused ourselves for so long that we no longer see the harm in an extramarital affair, so long as “no one is hurt by it.” The television shows we watch are full of it. The literature we read is full of it. Our mind-set and culture is full of it. And yet, God’s Word says, just as it has always said, “*You shall not commit adultery.*” God makes it plain that He expects His people to be faithful to each other in marriage.

Why? What is the reason for this? Because when a husband and wife are faithful to each other, they are depicting for the whole world to see that faithfulness is to be the norm in our relationships with God. He expects us to be faithful to Him, and we can depend on Him to be faithful to us. First Corinthians 1:9 reads, “*God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*” Psalm 36:5 tells us, “*Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the skies.*” And He expects us to be faithful in return. The marriage relationship is a picture of the faithfulness God expects of us.

What about your marriage right now? Is there trouble? It may be because one or both of you have violated this principle of marriage. Adultery destroys the relationship between a husband and a wife whether the other partner knows about the adultery or not. The marriage is doomed as long as adultery is part of that relationship. You cannot expect to have a home blessed by Christ if you will not be faithful to your wife or to your husband! Your adultery is in clear violation of God’s Word, and He will not bless your marriage until that issue is cleansed out of your life and marriage.

Before you get married, ask yourself this question: “Can I be faithful to this person for the rest of my life? Will this person be faithful to me?” If you do not think you can enter into the marriage relationship with one individual, forsaking all others, then you had better not get married. Your subsequent adultery will be nothing more than a mockery before God.

4 Marriage teaches us the life-long commitment God requires of His people.

As God originally intended it, marriage represents a life-long commitment of yourself to another person. In Matthew 19, the Pharisees came up to Jesus and asked, *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”* Jesus’ reply shows us that even though Moses’ Law allowed for divorce because of the hardness of men’s hearts, divorce was *not* part of God’s original purpose. God did not intend for a man to divorce his wife in the very beginning. That is why Jesus went on to say, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”*

God tells us in Malachi 2, *“I hate divorce.”* But notice that God says “I hate divorce,” not “I hate the divorcee.” What God is saying is that He hates the circumstances, the attitudes, the pain, the spiritual alienation that leads to divorce. He hates it when His children go through something like that. God originally intended marriage to be a life-long commitment between two people. Divorce cannot always be avoided. Alienation in a marriage cannot always be avoided. We are talking about an ideal, about God’s intended purpose for marriage.

But why is this life-long commitment in marriage so important to God? Because it symbolizes the life-long commitment God requires of us. We don’t divorce God! We may try at times to run from God, but common sense will tell you that is impossible. When your old, sin-loving nature dies, and you are re-born, you are a new creation in Christ. That is a life-changing, life-bringing experience but it is also a life-long commitment, if it is anything at all. Paul wrote, *“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ”* (Colossians 3:3).

Take a long look at your marriage right now. Is it in trouble? Are there rumblings that you are beginning to notice? It may be because there is no life-long commitment. Before you get married, ask yourself, “Can I live with this person for the rest of my life?” Never, never go into a marriage with the attitude that if it doesn’t work you can always get a divorce.

Marriage teaches us several truths about our relationship with God. Perhaps that is why marriage is so very important to God, and why God’s Word gives it so much emphasis. We’ve seen today that marriage teaches us the unity God desires to have with His people, the intimacy God longs to have with His people, the faithfulness God expects from His people, and the life-long commitment God requires of His people. When we Christians learn from our failures,

repent of them, and determine that we are going to live according to the Biblical mandates, we are giving the world the highest standards of marriage it has ever known.

In your personal relationship with God, do you know the joy of being united with Christ? Do you enjoy an intimate relationship with God? Can God count on you to be faithful? Have you surrendered yourself to a life-long commitment to God?

In your marriage, isn't it time you both join hands and publicly confess your sins, and ask God to help you start over in your relationship with each other and with Him?

In your marriage plans, won't you submit yourself to the teaching of God's Word as you search for a marriage partner?

"This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:32)