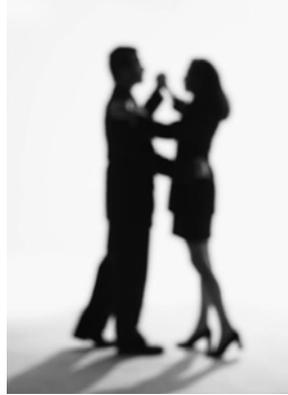


Helping Your Marriage Dance To God's Music —In A World That Is Totally *Out-of-Sync!*



Ephesians 5:22-33

The Big Idea: To help us pursue God's plan for marriage in light of an even *bigger* plan that God had from the beginning, namely *His Son's marriage to the Church!*

Text: Ephesians 5:22-33

22 Wives, **submit** to your husbands **as to the Lord**. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife **as Christ is the head of the church**, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now **as the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should **submit** to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, **love** your wives, **just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 **In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives** as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, **just as Christ does the church—** 30 **for we are members of his body**. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **the two will become one flesh**.” 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking **about Christ and the church**. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must **respect** her husband.

I doubt there are many other passages in God's Word that we are more familiar with than this one. For one thing, it represents the **most complete set of instructions on marriage in all of God's Word**. That in itself is *very* significant. Ephesians 5 is to marriage what Genesis 1 is to Creation. Or what Matthew 28 is to the Great Commission. Certainly no two believers considering marriage should proceed with their plans without serious examination of this text and their commitment to a *lifelong* pursuit of its implications. Likewise, no truly biblical church should consider marrying a couple whose knowledge of and commitment to the imperatives of this passage have not been thoroughly evaluated in pre-marital counseling.

But there is *another* reason why I know this passage is so familiar to us. And it is one I am able to cite from personal experience. Over the years I have listened to many husbands and wives quote from this passage. I have had husbands who could barely quote John 3:16 wax eloquent about *wives who wouldn't submit to them or respect them*. Likewise I have listened to wives who tearfully expressed their frustrations regarding *husbands who showed little love or who rarely exercised anything close to spiritual leadership in the home*.

The truth is, I tried to do the same thing very early in my own marriage when my wife and I had a major disagreement. I could see we weren't getting anywhere—so I got the bright idea that we could *quickly* solve the problem if she would simply recognize her duty to submit to me as the head of our home. This brilliant idea must have had some merit because my wife instantly recognized the wisdom of my pointing out *her* failure and so immediately did the same to me. She informed me that *her* failure to submit probably had a lot to do with *my* failure to love her as Christ loved the church.

So *what was my problem?* Was I *ignorant* of the truths of Ephesians 5? Hardly. I knew what this passage called for—well enough to quote it and skillfully apply its meaning to my wife's perceived failure! And yet both of us were stubbornly using the failure of the other as a reason to disregard what God was commanding *each of us* to do! The problem was that I had a personal desire—an unfulfilled dream if you will—that was blinding me to the real message in this text. My dream was not necessarily *bad* in itself. It is not necessarily wrong for me to want my wife to see my point of view and agree with me. That can be a good desire. But what makes that desire a bad desire is when I *want it more* than pleasing God and doing what *He* wants. My idolatrous heart had taken a sacred text and hijacked it right out of its context for my own self-serving purposes. In so many words, I had allowed my dream for a wife who always agrees with me to blind me to *God's dream* which meant learning to respond to my wife like Jesus Christ does to the Church.

But what is so wonderful about this passage is that God doesn't just dole out responsibilities like an impatient foreman just trying to get a job done. He graciously explains these duties in a much bigger context so that we not only understand *what* we are to do—but *why*. He not only commands us, He impels us by the grace of the Gospel to pursue them with *joy!* But to be impelled by His grace, we need fresh eyes to look at this text in its complete biblical context. So to that end, we need to do as Paul did and ask God for eyes to see and savor His grace. **[Pray from Ephesians 3:14-21]:**

¹⁴ *For this reason I kneel before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* ¹⁶ *I pray that out of [your] glorious riches [you] may strengthen us with power through [your] Spirit in [our] inner being,* ¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith. And I pray that [we], being rooted and established in love,* ¹⁸ *may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,* ¹⁹ *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—*

that [we] may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Regardless of what you may already know from this passage, there are three vitally important truths God wants you and me to know and to put into practice. The first one is...

I. Marriage is not *your* dream—but *God's* dream (vs. 31-32).

You already know of course that God designed marriage all the way back in Genesis 2:24. But do you know what else He had in mind—even way back then? Listen again to Ephesians 5:31-32:

*31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **the two will become one flesh.**" 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about **Christ and the church.***

Verse 31 is actually a direct quote from Genesis 2:24 and God's plan that marriage would involve a man and a woman entering into a lifelong, intimate relationship. Notice the phrase: "*the two will become one flesh.*" We understand this phrase to refer to the *deep intimacy* that God designed for Adam and Eve and all subsequent couples in marriage. "Two becoming one" in every aspect that two human beings can enjoy together: physically, spiritually, emotionally, financially, parentally, socially, vocationally, aesthetically—and so on. In *every way* God wants two people in marriage to become more and more like *one person*. And when that is happening—it is beautiful!

But something else is going on here. Something that formerly was shrouded in mystery but now has been made known to Paul—and *through him to us*. Even as Paul refers back to the very first wedding in the Garden of Eden, he makes it clear that God had something even bigger in view. Willie Nelson wasn't the first one to sing: "*You Were Always On My Mind.*" *Jesus* was singing it about the Church at the *very first* wedding!

Did you catch that?! At the *very first* wedding, our Lord (who is not bound by space or time) was thinking about *us*—**His** Bride! Pastor Ray Ortlund puts it this way: "*Human marriage claims [God's] personal attention **primarily** [not secondarily, not as an afterthought, but primarily] because it speaks of **Christ and the church.***" (*Whoredom*, p. 158). Even though Paul is very concerned that the marriages in the first century churches of Asia Minor would be strong and thriving—his *main burden* is to show how a Christian marriage reproduces in *miniature* the beauty shared between Christ and the Church.

Do you get what Paul is saying here? He is saying that every Christian marriage is intended to be a *foretaste* of Christ's ultimate *oneness* with the Church. Just like Baskin and Robbins designed a tiny spoon so you could get a taste of what some new flavor of ice cream tastes like, God designed human marriage so that *we* could have something in our experience that would help us have a foretaste of our relationship to our eternal Bridegroom Jesus! That is almost too much to take in. But take it in you must. Because if you don't take it in, if this reality doesn't capture your heart—then everything else Paul says in this passage about marriage will be of little value.

So what is the point here? Every marriage starts with a dream. Most of you who are married or who may one day consider marriage—you didn't or won't just get married because it seemed like a good idea. "*I'm lonely. You're poor. I think we can make this work.*" No. You came into marriage with high hopes and big dreams. So—how's the dream going? If your mind was a movie theater where your dreams are regularly playing and your forehead was the marquee—what title would I see on your marquee? As you prepared for marriage or in the early months of marriage, you might have had titles like:

- The Sound of Music.
- Sleeping Beauty.
- It's A Wonderful Life.
- Some Like It Hot.

But after two sinners finally say I do and begin to experience life together, the marquee can change to titles like:

- V for Vendetta.
- Beauty and the Beast.
- Saving Private Ryan.
- Eight Below.

If that has been your experience, if your dream has never materialized, I have some wonderful news for you. God never promised you that He would make all your dreams come true. He has something better. God wants you to make ***His*** dream ***your*** dream.

Transition: The first truth is: Marriage is not *your* dream—but *God's* dream. But dreams are not the stuff that our present life is made of. Which brings us to the second important truth of this passage...?

- II. The ultimate success of your marriage is not dependent on the performance of your spouse—but on *your faith response* to your unseen Bridegroom, Jesus Christ (Vs. 22-30).

Just look with me again at this passage and see from whom we get our cues. Let's start with wives in verse 22 and then will look at husbands when we get to verse 25.

22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband are the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body.

How you respond to the failures of your spouse may say something about your approval or disapproval of their performance. But it says *even more* about *your faith* in Christ's promises and His gracious call to you. You may be thinking, "how can I do what God tells me to do when my spouse isn't living up to his or her part of the deal?" The answer is: *Who are you?* Go back and look at your role as husband or wife in light of the rest of this book. You aren't just "*you*" anymore. You used to be just "*you*" when you were dead and trespasses and sins. In those graceless days you *couldn't do good* in the face of other's failure. You were in bondage to sinful desires and could only do a cheap imitation of "good" to those who did you "good." But *now* you are "*in Christ.*" And *He* does good because *He is good.* And what good has He done for you? Look at Ephesians 1:2. I challenge you to go home and bury your heart in all the blessings God has lavished on you. Go through Paul's hymn of praise in 3-14 and see all that the triune God has done for you (Read?)

So what does all this mean? It means that no matter how your dream is going on any given day, nothing can affect your identity or what God is doing to fulfill His promises in you. It means that the Holy Spirit is working to fill you with the fullness of Christ so you can reflect your invisible Bridegroom's image and live *His life* in your marriage *before* a watching world.

I am not saying this is easy. It is *hard* work. In fact, there is no way you or I can do this in our own strength. But what I'm saying is: *Do you really believe all this stuff?* Or is it just God talk that we come to hear because it's the Lord's Day and that Christian's do? Brothers and sisters—this is REAL. And these promises are *true*. Maybe the dreams you once had and your current reality seem far apart. But as far apart as they may seem, the reality that will hit you when you stand in the presence of your beautiful Savior will

be *more real* and more tangible than the brightest lights at any theatre or sporting event you have ever attended.

Brothers and sisters. Think Ephesians. Dream Ephesians. It is God's wedding book for the church. It is real—more real than life itself. Don't despise these promises by treating them lightly. Bask in their glow. Revel in their glory. Pray that God will give you eyes to see the love that your Bridegroom has lavished upon you. Don't let your desire your unfulfilled dream blind you and keep you from passionately pursuing *God's dream!*

Which brings us to one other truth in this text that you and I need to grasp.

Review: I. Marriage is not *your* dream—but *God's* dream (vs. 31-32).

II. The ultimate success of your marriage is not dependent on the performance of your spouse—but on *your faith response* to your unseen Bridegroom, Jesus Christ (Vs. 22-30).

III. Therefore, your God-given role in marriage calls you to always *stay in step* with your ultimate lover, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once you understand that God's dream is bigger than *your* dream and that His dream is even bigger than your spouse's failures or weaknesses, you are free to cooperate with God's Spirit in living out your role as a Christian husband or wife. You are free from the bitterness and resentment of unmet expectations and free to *be* and *act* according to *who you really are* in Christ.

A. For wives—your role is submission to your husband “in everything.”

That is not a blank check. That does not mean that a husband can command a wife to go against Scripture or her own conscience. “In everything” means that a wife is to subordinate herself to her husband's leadership in *every area* of life.

As we have already said, submission is not a position that is demeaning or inferior. A woman's submission makes her no more inferior than the church's own submission to Christ. Or for that matter, Christ's submission to His Father. Submission is staying in step with the Bridegroom—even when your earthly bridegroom is not pulling off his role particularly well that day,

B. For husbands—your role is loving your wife as Christ loved the Church.

We don't have time to break down all the verses here. But the big picture is clear. Husbands, we get our cues from Christ. I know some of you

might be wondering why I don't talk about the part where Paul says you are to the head of your home. I don't say that to husbands because Paul only says it to wives in verse 23. In other words, it is not your responsibility to remind her to obey you. So if you thought that was the case, I have good news for you. You have just been relieved of a duty that you no longer have to be concerned about! ***It is your responsibility*** (and privilege) ***to love your wife as Christ loved the Church.***

Concluding illustration:

Compare the universe to dancing. Creation is like an orchestra. People like dancers. All following the conductor's baton. Sin enters—not via the orchestra, but the dancers themselves. Convinces the dancers to dance to their own tune. Chaos. People doing their own thing. Their out of sync with the conductor, the orchestra, and each other. Orchestra still playing. But haltingly and uncertain because of the chaos on the dance floor. The chaos continues until...

God's Son enters. And He dances. Perfectly in sync with the Conductor. Through the entire symphony. Not only the music that is celebrative, but the music that is tragic and even painful. On that song, He dances all the way to the cross—***for His Bride.***

One day, He will dance with His bride face to face at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. What a Day that will be! In the meantime, He dances invisibly with His Church. But he left behind a reminder and a picture of that invisible, yet powerful reality. That dance is ***your*** marriage!

[A testimony from a growing couple about their dance].

If you are married, then dance with your spouse this week—but do so taking your cues from your ultimate Bridegroom. And if you aren't married, just remember that marriage is only a temporary reflection of a far greater and eternal reality. You too have opportunities to dance with the Bridegroom of the Church. Just read the rest of Ephesians to find your cues. And let's keep reminding each other that the Wedding Day is coming. Even so come quickly Lord Jesus!

