
Honor One Another

Marriage

Genesis 2:18-24; Ephesians 5:22-33

6/2/2019

Main Idea: A healthy, open, Christ-centered marriage reflects the gospel to the world.

Lesson Objective: Know and become who we are made to be in Christ so that we can fulfill our responsibilities in life.

Introduction

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

What are some specific ways—either positively or negatively—your family situation (parents, their marriage, kids, siblings, etc.) has influenced you? Are there any marriages you look up to or admire? What is it about those marriages that makes them admirable? Why do you think marriage is important to God?

Marriage teaches you loyalty, forbearance, self-restraint, meekness, and a great many other things you wouldn't need if you were single.

Of course, single people need these character qualities, too. The real point is there is no other relationship that puts these character traits to the test like marriage. Of all the exercises in spiritual formation, Christian marriage is the most rigorous, the most intimate, the most life changing. What you are before your spouse is what you are in reality. So, make sure you are growing as a married person. Make sure your marriage is growing more spiritual. If you're not growing there, then you're probably not growing anywhere.

God established marriage as a representation of His relationship with His followers; He is our groom and we, as the church, are His bride. Whether or not we are married or have children, God's design for the family teaches us about how we are to relate to one another.

God's Design

Genesis 2:18-24

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

From the very beginning, God wanted mankind to live in a loving community. Man was created with the need for fellowship with God and others. God stated that **It was not good for man should be alone**, and revealed His plan to remedy it. The phrase "**not good**" makes it clear that creation was not finished until Eve had been created. 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 Adam's ribs to use as His raw material, the woman would correspond perfectly—though not identically—to Adam. He was incomplete without her, and the relationship which all later men and women form in marriage must take precedence over all other relationships with other people, including even the man's parents. The creation of the woman

thus functions as the high point of chapter 2. She is the capstone of creation. 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. 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.

A great debate over whether the word "**helper**" implies subordination has been conducted within recent scholarship. This word, when used in the book of Psalms, gives us a picture of an active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts. It is also used in the Psalms of God's help and cannot therefore imply innate subordination. God is no person's subordinate. The expression "**fit for him**" expresses complementarity, not identity. The woman is the mirror image of the man and because of that is able to genuinely help him.

God wanted us to understand that the animals and birds were formed out of the ground, just as the man was. This should remind us of the close relationship between them in that they are made of the same substance. The world which the Lord God created did not have the conflict between humanity and animals, which is so much a part of our experience. Adam's understanding of the animals he named only highlighted the differences that existed between him and the rest of God's creatures: **there was not found a helper fit for him**. While animals and birds are radically different from humans (the Lord God did not breathe into their nostrils the breath of life), they share a common source of origin and so, at least potentially, should live in harmony with the human family.

The Bible tells us that there will be one day in which this original harmony will be restored (Isa. 11:6–9).

It is interesting that “naming” can be understood as implying the superiority of the “namer.” Here Adam “names” the animals, but none of them function as a suitable “helper.” When that suitable helper is found, Adam does not “name” her. It is only after the Fall with its distorted relationships between the genders that Adam “names” Eve. It is as though the text were hinting at the notion that in order to find a “helper” one must give up on notions of superiority and look to mutuality.

Having created a sense of need in the man, the Lord God then made the woman from the side of the man. This touching passage shows the personal side of creation. Interpreters have argued over the “rib” which the woman was created from, *Commemoratio Geneseos* asserts: “Why was the woman formed from a rib? For if she were formed from his foot or hand or some other part she would stand in shame before him. Another interpretation is that it shows the greatest love, for the rib is, after all, closest to the heart, as it is said: the rib is the guardian of the heart.” Certainly as Christians we gain insight into the nature of our closest relationships from this text. Unscarred by the distorting effects of sin, we see marriage, friendship, and family as God intended it to be.

Adam’s first response after seeing Eve is difficult to translate. It denotes “time” or “occasion.” We often respond in similar by saying, “This is it!” The man’s enthusiasm at finally finding a suitable partner for him is hidden in his response. The closeness of the relationship between man and woman is indicated by the phrase “**bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.**” She is as close to him as his own bones and flesh. We are not told whether the man knew at this point that she was literally his bones and flesh. The phrase “**Therefore a**

man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife” is not calling for a total sever of ties between the parents. God established a priority for the married couple. The mystery of how two individuals join together to fulfill their roles in marriage parallels the relationship between Christ and His church.

Notice that the text says, **“his wife”** in the singular. In a patriarchal society such as Israel’s, polygamy was often the accepted right for the male. Here Genesis is saying that marriage as the Lord God designed it was to be monogamous. Whatever it has become through the corrupting effects of sin, it was created as a wonderful relationship between one man and one woman.¹

What does this passage tell us about the purpose of marriage in God’s kingdom?

Why do you think God created man and woman to understand and experience love in such different ways?

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

For those of you who aren’t married, how does this affect your view and expectation of marriage?

¹ Paul J. Kissling, [Genesis](#), The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2004–), 168–178.

Wives

Ephesians 5:22-24

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

Paul taught the Ephesian church the implications for Christian living in his letter. Within chapter 5, he focused on Christian living in the world. He illustrated how God expected His people to behave, which led him to discuss family relationships. The context for submission within the above passage comes from a list of actions that shows the Holy Spirit's presence in a believer's life by commanding this attitude with one another. In today's society, the idea may seem outlandish. Yet in Christian fellowship we must be willing to learn from others, even from those who differ from us in age, gender, or station in life. We are also called on to serve one another and be willing to accept counsel and correction from others. An aggressive, arrogant attitude is the opposite of being careful in the way we live.

The wife is to **submit to [her] husband as to the Lord**. This does not mean that she submits to her husband in the same way and to the same degree as she does the Lord, since the husband might ask her to disobey God. Rather, she serves the Lord by having a submissive heart toward her husband and by obeying him as long as it does not require her to disobey the Lord. The reason she is called upon to be subject to her husband is that the husband is **the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church**. As the church is to be subject to Christ, so the wife is to be subject to her husband. This subjection does not

mean inferiority. As we mentioned in the last section, male and female are both created in the image of God. We also can learn from Scripture that in Christ, where personal worth is concerned, there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). However, in the overall scheme of things, God has placed all of us in differing positions of authority and submission. The man may be in authority at home but submissive at work. The woman may be in submission at home and in authority at work. The point is, all social order depends on people’s willingness to work together and ability to determine who is the head of certain endeavors. God’s intention is that the husband be the head of the relationship with his wife.

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. Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father during His ministry. This does not mean that Jesus became less than the Father, nor does it mean that He no longer had lost His worthiness to be called God. Jesus willingly submitted His will to the will of the Father in order to give us a beautiful picture of how we are to relate to one another. In the same way, Christians don’t submit because someone forces them to do so; they submit voluntarily. Wives did not lose their identity and become property of the husband. They were the husband’s partner and received from him sacrificial love. The wife’s relation to the Lord is the basis, motivation, and qualification of her submission to her husband.

Verse 23 is surely one of the most abused and debated texts in the New Testament. Its focus is *not* on the privilege and dominance of the husband, and Paul never intended to suggest that wives were servants, compelled to follow any and every desire of the husband. The text does not tell women to *obey* their

husbands, nor does it give any license for husbands to attempt to force submission. It does focus on the self-giving love of both Christ and the husband. “**Head**” in this context suggests “responsibility for.” The husband has a leadership role, though not in order to boss his wife or use his position as privilege. Just as Jesus redefined greatness as being a servant (Matt. 20:26–27), Paul redefines being head as having responsibility to love, to give oneself, and to nurture.

A priority is placed on the husband, but, contrary to ancient society, *it is for the benefit of the wife*. The activity of both wife and husband is based in their relation to Christ and in his giving himself for the church. Out of this love that God has given them for one another they are compelled to submit “**in everything.**” This indicates that all spheres of life are included in this submission, provided, of course, that it is in keeping with life lived “**to the Lord.**” Although the husband has responsibility for the wife’s welfare, he is not her savior and plays no role in her salvation. This everything that Christians do must fall under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.²

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?

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

How is Jesus’ work on the cross an example of submission for us?

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

² Klyne Snodgrass, [Ephesians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 293–296.

Husbands

Ephesians 5:25-33

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

After instructing wives to submit to their husbands, he instructs husbands to **love [their] wives** so completely and so righteously that the wife need never fear or suffer from her life of submission. Husbands are to love their wives just **as Christ loved the church**. Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself up for her. Jesus dedicated His life to the establishment and welfare of the church. To that degree, and in that quality, the husband is to love his wife. He is to **give himself up for her**. He is to dedicate his life to the physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare of his wife. Following the example of Christ, he is to give his wife not only all that he has, but also all that he is. When a husband loves his wife so completely, the wife need never fear submission.

Paul goes on to extend the picture of Christ and the church. Christ loved the church that He might **sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing**

of water with the word. The water does not refer to baptism per se, but is a figure of speech, referring to the cleansing that the Holy Spirit brings to the soul through repentance, after hearing the Word of God. It is as Jesus said in John 15:3, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” Applying water to the outside of the physical body can have no effect whatsoever to the spiritual cleansing that makes one holy. Through repentance, the water of the word reaches the innermost recesses of the soul, cleansing and making it holy. However, we do know from history that the early church would only have baptized someone who had truly repented. In this understanding, baptism would be an outward sign of repentance and of the spiritual cleansing resulting from the repentance, itself a result of hearing and obeying the Word. The New Testament does not suggest that baptism cleanses a person apart from repentance or that baptism apart from personal faith can save a person. We might amplify the meaning of this phrase by saying that the true church heard the Word of Christ preached and believed it. They were born again, regenerated, washed and cleansed spiritually by believing the Word.

The result of this work of Christ is that the church is presented **in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.** If a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, his love and care will have a sanctifying influence on the wife, who will experience personal benefit and progress as a result. After having presented the work of Christ for the church, Paul now comes back to the reality of husband-wife relationships. He repeats the fact that **husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.** Even though the husband lives in an imperfect body, he loves it, nourishes it, and cherishes it. So he is to do the same for his wife, even though she is imperfect. The wife will never be perfect, but she becomes more than she would if the husband does

not love her as Christ loved the church. Paul repeats Genesis 2:24, establishing that a husband and wife are to become one flesh, and closes by restating that the relationship between the wife and a husband is like the relationship between Christ and the church.

After discussing the role of the husband, Paul comes back in a summary statement in verse 33 to add that the wife is to respect her husband. In summary, she is to be subject to her husband and to respect him. Respect literally means “fear.” It can refer, however, to the fear a person should have before God, a reverence and respect (Luke 1:50; 18:2; Acts 10:35; 1 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 14:7; 19:5). This type of reverence and regard should characterize the relationship of a wife and her husband. A husband is not to view his leadership as superior but as a responsibility and commitment to sacrifice everything for his wife.

Paul also used the imagery of husbands loving their wives as their own bodies. Just as Christ nourishes and nurtures each of us as members of His body, a husband is to humble himself to seek his wife’s best interests, provide unselfishly for her welfare, and give priority to their relationship above all other human relationships. A man’s and woman’s commitment to God and to each other forms the basis for a godly marriage. In marriage we accept a spouse just as God accepts us, for who he or she is. We also seek to help our spouse mature as a Christian so our marriage can deepen, reflecting God’s love and grace. As we do, the bond of friendship and love continues to strengthen through the years. Paul summarized the relationship between the husband and wife by calling them to love and respect each other. Mutual love and respect offer the best chance for a successful home.

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?

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

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 does a proper view of marriage affect our relationship with God?

How does it affect the lives of those of us who are single?