

Ephesians 5:22-33 Marriage & The Mission of God

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[0 : 00] And we're in Ephesians 5 today, discussing marriage, as you might have guessed by Josh's excellent order of worship.

! He texted me earlier in the weeks, like, what are we talking about? And I just had to throw out the princess bride gif, you know, the marriage gif right away.

Anyway, let's go ahead and just start by reading the first section there in Ephesians 5, beginning of verse 22. Did you tell them what I responded with?

What did you respond? Inconceivable. Inconceivable, yes. Ephesians 5, 22, we'll read to verse 27 to begin with.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, 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. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

[1 : 04] Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

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. It's very important when reading a book like Ephesians or 1 John, one of these shorter letters, that you don't develop what is very common in modern evangelicalism, what I call new sectionitis.

And you'll see this in commentaries and also just when Christians read their Bibles, where they assume that Paul has jumped into an entirely different topic, or that John has jumped into an entirely different topic, and they fail to ask or assume the best of the writer or the authorial skill of the apostle and the Holy Spirit and say, he's probably not just jumping around. He's probably continuing a progression of thought.

I believe that today, if you'll listen to this message and maybe re-listen to it, and that you will just give your heart to the Lord and your mind to the Lord as it relates to the issue of marriage, I believe today you will find some really fundamental truth and goodness in this sermon.

Because what I'm going to do is I'm going to show you that when Paul begins discussing marriage in Ephesians 5, he's doing that because it is literally connected to everything else he has just described.

[2 : 41] And I'm just going to point three sort of patterns that you'll see in the book of Ephesians and make application to these in your marriage. Let me just say it just maybe more clearly.

You would be making a mistake that a lot of other people made if you thought, I want to know what God's will is for marriage, and you turn to Ephesians 5, 22. You just wouldn't. You would be making a mistake.

That is not where you start. That doesn't even have the most important data about marriage. And so let me show you what I mean. Paul's not jumping into a new topic.

He's been discussing one main thing throughout the book of Ephesians, and that is he's making a series of one-flesh arguments. We see in our passage today in Matthew, I almost keep saying Matthew, in Ephesians 5, 28.

Look at this with me, Ephesians 5, 28. He starts talking about this one-flesh concept. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, he who loves his wife loves himself.

[3 : 48] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church. Because we are members of his body, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. This is the

same argument Paul has made throughout the entire book of Ephesians.

He is making essentially this fundamental argument. God has moved heaven and earth to create entities that weren't connected originally and now are connected.

That's the whole point of Ephesians. It starts at the beginning in chapter 1, in verse 7, for instance, by saying, first and foremost, we, as enemies of God, have been chosen to be redeemed and adopted into his family.

So the first unity picture we see in the book of Ephesians is the unity that God has created through the cross and bringing the estranged sinner into fellowship with God so that he is now a son of God or she is now a daughter of God.

[5 : 13] This continues into chapter 2, where he makes the point again in verse 5, for instance, where he says, Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

One of the things you could see, and I'm not going to talk about it very much today, but is you could look at all of these unity passages and see that they all have an eschatological end. They're always pointing to the new creation where this new union that God has created has eternal consequences and eternal purposes.

It's in every one of these unity passages. So first unity passage is, You and God were estranged, but God in his perfect purposes through eternal decree predestined you to be adopted as a child in his family.

That's the first unity concept that emerges. And then we have a second unity concept that emerges from there. Again in chapter 2 we're told about the Jews and the Gentiles, the chosen people of God, those in Abraham biologically now adjoined to the whole nations, so that all who were once estranged from each other are now not only reconciled to God as sons and daughters, but reconciled to each other as brothers and sisters.

[6 : 48] So that's the theme that emerges out of the first grouping. First grouping, you were a stranger to God. You were an enemy of God.

You're now his child. Second grouping, two disparate groups are now made one. Third grouping, chapter 4.

Now we're in the local church, which is the exact same phenomenon, just at a different scale. It's a bunch of people who have no practical reason to be connected as brothers and sisters in Christ, but are connected because of the work that God has done.

Look at chapter 4, verse 1. I therefore, prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all.

[7 : 58] You see this kind of cemented in verse 25 of chapter 4, where he makes another direct appeal to this unity concept.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. So do you see how, if you had new sectionitis, and you got into Ephesians 5, you know, 20s, and you didn't understand when Paul makes his one flesh argument in Ephesians 5 that he's made three others already.

He's made three other exact same arguments already, those arguments being essentially what God has moved heaven and earth to bring together, let no man tear asunder.

When I do a wedding, I have, you know, I have, like, different, you know, all men have different levels of authority voices, you know, and, like, I say one thing in my deep, dad, you're about to get it voice.

At the, right before I, right before we end the wedding, I say, what God has joined together, let no man or woman tear asunder.

[9 : 16] That's my deepest dad voice moment in a wedding because that's actually fundamental to everything God is doing. What God has brought together, whether it be within a marriage, a local church, the invisible church, or our union with him as individuals, let no man tear asunder.

That's a fundamental theme that Paul is operating from in the book of Ephesians, and you need to know that as you think about marriage.

It's just another piece of something Paul is doing progressively. This means a couple things. Any form of disunity in an entity that God has created is defiance of God's great work, it's defiance of God's great gospel, and it's kind of like an autoimmune disease, and that it's just something that should not be.

God made a new thing, and that thing should be functioning well together. So it's important to frame your marriage or your local church or just general concepts of unity around, as we've talked about this multiple times, its intention is to glorify God all the way from its beginning, all the way to eternity, where it will declare the wisdom of him who brought these things together to every principality and power.

However, this is a concept widely understood by Paul. Colossians speaks, Philippians speaks, of Christ reconciling all things together to himself, and the whole idea is that the unity king is here, and there's all kinds of unities that aren't pleasing to God.

[11:00] Tower of Babel being one we've talked about, but the unities that God has created are sacred and deserve our utmost reverence and awe.

Now, that would be one way you would need to kind of keep the whole book in mind to understand what Paul's doing with the marriage conversation. This is literally not for you to have happy marriage.

This is not why this passage exists. That's a downstream effect of this passage, but this passage, like all the other places in, Ephesians doesn't exist for us to have a happy church.

Like, it will produce a happy church, but it exists all of it for the praise of his glory and grace. Okay, so the second layer that you'd want to make sure you connect with is just this role that Christian ethics plays in maintaining the unity of whatever entity it is that God has brought together.

And so I would just say, like, let me just say this somewhat radically, there is a far more practical and, in some sense, important instruction for marriage in chapter 4 and beginning of chapter 5 than the end of chapter 5.

[12:13] I would say that if you will obey Ephesians 4.1 through 5.21, you'll have a great marriage. You don't even need to, you won't even need to think about most of this stuff. Because the ethical stuff happening in that section is all Paul's effort to say, practically, what does it mean to live reverentially toward the thing God has united, whether it be a local church or a marriage.

And I've obviously been a pastor for a long time now, and, like, I'll just tell you that I don't, you know, I used to go to Ephesians 5.22.23 and start there, and I would always see that the problems in the marriage were upstream.

And somewhere in Ephesians 4, usually. And sometimes maybe in Ephesians, you know, beginning of Ephesians 5. Let me just make some obvious points. I think you understand what I'm getting at, but let's just, we've got the time.

Let me just make sure you're tracking with me practically. Ephesians 4.2 says that we're supposed to, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bear with one another in love. If you're doing that in your marriage, you're copacetic, man.

Like, things are great. Like, that's a very significant ethical choice to make, a behavioral choice to make. Ephesians 4.15, speak the truth in love so that we can grow up every way into him.

[13:41] And marriages suffer from both the sins of omission and commission when it comes to speech. We say things we ought not say, or in the way that we ought not say them, but we also have plenty of examples where we should have said something, and we don't.

If we were obeying Ephesians 4.15, boom. Suddenly marriage is working much better. Because these are rules to maintain unity in general.

Ephesians 4.25, Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. You can't lie to your own body. It actually won't work.

It feels like it's expedient. It just won't actually play that. It won't work. Lying to your own body is like self-harm. Like, it's just, it doesn't work.

Ephesians 4.26, Be angry, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Unresolved conflict in marriage. Ephesians 4.28, Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, so that he may have something to share.

[14:41] Marriage is, you'll see this exact statement told to women in Titus 2, specifically busybodies. Like, there's just certain rules for unity, and one of them is like, just stay busy, do your

work, mind your own business.

Like, and it applies just in every entity. Ephesians 4.29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up.

Your words to your spouse are either load-bearing walls that are creating conditions for peace and harmony and joy, or they are tearing something down.

Ephesians 4.31-32, Let all bitterness and wrath and clamor and slander be put away from you. Be kind to one another. Oh my goodness, how often I've seen a Christian marriage enter my counseling office, and it is just apparent that there is not a consistent, regular habit of kindness in this home.

Ephesians 5.1-2, Be imitators of God. Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. You're seeing the same thing mentioned to the local church that Paul's about to tell husbands.

[16:01] Ephesians 5.3-4, See if you can see this connection in your marriage. But sexual immorality and all impurity, let it not even be named among you. Ephesians 5.15-16, Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time.

Yeah. We could just continue on and on, the point being, this whole section of commands that we've walked through over the last few weeks, calling it Tools for Transformation, this whole section of commands is actually how one does any kind of unity, including your marriage.

And if you're having trouble, like one of the things I would say is, like this is, start in chapter four.

Because if you are not living this way toward the one God has called you into oneness with, yeah, that's going to be an issue.

Okay. I would actually say, though, that probably the most important thing I could communicate to you this morning has to do with this concept we see related to submission in the text.

And I think it's very important that we deal with this in a way that you probably don't see coming. I want you to just think about the word submission for a moment.

[17:25] What is the root word and what is the prefix in this word? So that the root word is mission. And remember, my argument for this whole sermon is that what Paul is doing is he is applying everything he said already to the smallest unit of measurement that God has created a unity for.

And I think also the most foundational unit of measurement. Okay. The root word of submission is mission. And Paul does not introduce the concept of submission in a vacuum.

He introduces it into a structure that has been purpose-built across five chapters. What I mean by that is the purpose of your marriage is not domestic harmony.

It is not relational satisfaction. It is the mission of God in the world. That's the purpose of your marriage. It's the mission of God in the world.

That's why your marriage exists. So now what I'm doing is I'm suggesting that in terms of your relational realities, you should really lean into four through five. But in terms of what your marriage is for, you should really lean into chapters one through three.

[18:43] Because chapters one through three is about the God's mission working its way out into the world. And marriage is just one more tool like the local church that God has created to advance his mission into the world.

And what I want to suggest is that the whole reason there is massive controversy around the word submission and how it can't be addressed with just raw based patriarchy, which I would be the classical patriarchal guy, but I just tell you, you're just not going to fix it with that.

You're not going to fix it with trad. And I'll tell you exactly what's going on. We have raised a generation of people who are fundamentally selfish. And they live for themselves and they turn every one of God's gifts into a gift for themselves.

And the greatest glories they've ever experienced, whether it be the local church or their marriage, just becomes filtered through the question of how does this work for me?

And if you read your marriage as that, the word submission makes no sense. Because in that case, we are just competitive consumers trying to get to a finite-sized pie of privileges.

[20:03] But that's not what Paul's talking about in Ephesians. Paul is talking about the God of the universe through eternal decree looking down and making decisions about who he would save and the good works that they would walk in so that he could, through Christ and Christ's people, produce a people for the praise of his glory and grace, that he could lavish his kindness on them for all eternity and do so in front of all principalities and powers, proving that he is the all-wise, good, and sovereign king of the universe.

And your marriage exists to echo that. that's the mission of your marriage. And if you don't know that, and I would have infinite patience for the fact that you don't, nothing in your culture is helping you to know that, even including, what, 90, would you say 90% of marriage books in the Christian space?

Friends, here's the reality. when the mission is righteous and good and true and beautiful, submission makes sense.

When the mission is, it's my time to pick the restaurant, or we need to be more physically this, we need to have more of this and that and this, when the mission is essentially personal happiness or even marital unity for the sake of marital unity, you've lost the plot.

Now, I'm speaking with a bit of an edge here because of all the things I have felt convicted of in my life. I preach God's word every Sunday and I believe it all to be true, but I have lived this.

[21 : 58] I have lived a counter-cultural life in this area. I've been in love with my wife for 30 years.

I've wanted to take care of her. I've wanted her to have a good life. About, gosh, 30 to 40% of the things she loves about her life now came because I told her to do something she didn't want to do, by the way.

But more importantly, we have served the Lord Jesus with our marriage. And we have served the Lord's church with our marriage.

And we are sinful people, but the Lord in His grace through His Spirit just helped us not to lose that plot, at least not for very long.

And I can say confidently that my marriage has been a tool for God's mission for 30 years. And I can also say confidently that my wife is happy, that I am happy, that we have a great relationship, and that all those things that come down from that are just as Jesus told us they would be when we seek first the kingdom of God.

[23 : 20] What does He tell us? Then all these things will be added to you. Friends, we've done a lot of dumb things in the world's eyes.

We walked away, as many of you have, from the simplicities of dual income for a season, for an extended season. We made certain choices about how we raised our children. Our home has been a revolving door of not just dinners, but borders.

Our marriage has been a tool for God's mission. And so I want to tell you that I would just beg you to imitate us in this way.

It really will unlock what God has wanted for your life. And singles, I just wouldn't get married until this is just the firm conviction of your heart.

That does not to say that I think singleness is ideal. It's not, I think that actually God has called us to rule and subdue and that really requires a pair and so forth. So I would just say, I would not argue for some kind of mid-2000s contentedness and singleness thing.

[24 : 48] But I would tell you this, if you're single right now, ask the Lord to light a fire under you, not so that you have someone to go to bed with at night, not so you don't have to be lonely when you're eating out, not for all these other things, ask the Lord to light a dominion, mission-oriented service to the saints, caring for the church, fire in you, and just see what that does to how you view other potential marriage partners, and also how you view this season of singleness itself.

If you have the time, which some of you do, and that's not your choice, I understand, man, just grab that concept and just don't let go of it.

Here's the interesting thing that the Lord delivered, I think, just because he loves us. As I was working on this, I'm done, really. I just want to tell you, please, for the love of God, treat your spouse as well as Paul says to treat the average church member in Ephesians 4 and 5, and please, for the love of God, use your marriage to serve other people.

Fundamentally hospitality, fundamentally generosity, at the very least. So I could just be done now, but there's this crazy gift from God that just landed on my plate last night as I was not even trying to write more sermon.

Picture this with me. Ephesus is a rough place. It's just so provoking to the soul because it's so full of idolatry, and the idolatry is ingrained all the way to the consumer level.

[26 : 40] It's people's livelihoods. It's not just a religious thing. It's sort of living in the idol factory. It can be violent. Riots can happen.

Economic hardships for being a monotheist are pronounced. Letters have been exchanged for, well, for at least 100 years between the Jews and the various Caesars, saying, would you please

tell the guards, the official, the police in Ephesus to stop being so mean to us.

It's a hard place to be a monotheist, let alone a Christian. And Paul spent two years there, and he said as he was leaving, I know that upon my departure fierce wolves will come, even from among you, and will not spare the sheep.

It's a hard place to be. It's a hard place to be a Christian. It's a hard place to be married. Read the whole thing. So, there's this little church in Ephesus, and they get a letter from the Apostle Paul. And they're probably in a church, a house church, which is not a living room. People with money would convert a big part of their home into an actual chapel-like vibe.

[27 : 59] And so, they're there, and they're hearing this letter, and you can read through Ephesians, and I would guess about 15 minutes or so, it's not a long letter. So, you'd probably get the first big overview that way.

And this idea of a mission-oriented marriage would just have been much more clear to this early century people, because they didn't really have the choice to be consumers. They were living in a different moment in church history.

Anyway, church that they're sitting in, the home that they're sitting in, it is almost certainly the home founded by one of the most familiar couples in the New Testament, a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, the couple that Paul calls his synergists, his fellow workers.

He puts Aquila and Priscilla in the same category as Timothy and Titus. They had planted themselves, we know from the book of Acts primarily, they had planted themselves in Ephesus years earlier and were most likely still physically present as this letter was being read.

Their fingerprints were all over this church. church. As a married couple, their fingerprints were all over this church. Ephesian believers did not need a sermon illustration about a mission-forward marriage because they were sitting inside of the consequence of a mission-forward marriage.

[29 : 41] Aquila and Priscilla mentioned six times in the New Testament and every single time they appear together. never one without the other. Luke and Paul treat them both like an indivisible unit.

You can trace their movements. They were expelled from Rome under Claudius' edict around 80AD. They land in Corinth. Paul finds them there, fellow tent makers, and moves into their home.

They work alongside him for 18 months and when Paul sails for Syria, they go with him and he drops them in Ephesus and there they stay being married, being in love, and building. By the time Paul writes Romans from Corinth, he tells the Roman church to greet Priscilla and Aquila because they seem to have gone back to Rome at least for a season when the persecution there died down. In fact, he mentions them not just to one church but to all the churches. He says in Romans 16 that all of the churches give thanks to this couple.

And in verse 5 of Romans 16, greet also the church in their house. Their marriage had a pattern.

[31 : 01] Arrive, establish a household, open the doors, build church. In Corinth, a church in their house. In Ephesus, probably also a church in their house.

Back in Rome, after Claudius' death, another church in their house, the household was the strategy. The household was the tool. It was the tool that God used to spread Christianity from a group of people that could fit in a lifeboat around the world.

The household. And now you can begin to see why Paul is landing on marriage in Ephesians 5 after starting with the God of the universe from his throne issuing eternal decree to reconcile all things to himself through this man, this probably little man named Jesus.

There was no majesty or form or appearance in him. He was so easily overlooked, especially when he was bleeding on a cross. It was easy to mock all of the delusions of grandeur with people.

With this prophet who could so called save others but not save himself. And so God chose to reconcile the world through this, the most indivisible unit possible, which is a single individual fully surrendered to the will of God.

[32 : 28] But when he dies and he is laid in the tomb, the Genesis story really starts over again. We've talked about this. In his wounded side, a new bride is born.

the church of Jesus Christ. He, along with this bride, will rule and subdue, be fruitful and multiply until the whole world is full of his glory.

But you can see, if you know God, this is just him, how will the God of the universe choose to fill the world with his glory through a husband and wife who bicker while they make their tent?

who struggle to be patient with one another? How many times do you think Aquila waited in the chariot while Priscilla was getting ready and said she was ready?

God has a sense of humor. He decided to do all of this through two old people who, when they told they had to start having sex again, laughed because Sarah said, I am very old.

[33 : 34] Do you think I will have pleasure again? God is so into your marriage, but you have to give it to him and stop holding on to it to make it something it's not supposed to be.

The world has tried to set your expectations in a thousand different ways, and I promise you, every one of them leads to disappointment, but if you will give this thing, which is probably the most important thing in your life, to Jesus, you will be shocked.

shocked. You will be shocked. Right now in Charleston, South Carolina, my friend Greg Dernberger and a few other guys are, and women, are doing some assessments for future church planters, and Greg has developed the most quintessential, like, little bit of truth that he acts on in these assessments, and that truth is simply this.

he calls it a vitalized marriage. A vitalized marriage is just what I'm talking about here. That's in his mind. That's the word he uses. He says, you take an average gifted pastor with a vitalized marriage, and they will be able to successfully plant a church most of the time.

You take a very highly gifted pastor with an unvitalized marriage, and most of the time it's a train wreck. I call it the great doctrine.

[35 : 03] He's absolutely right. So while he's doing assessments on their preaching skills and their vision and so on and so forth, truth be told, they're really focusing on what is this marriage like?

Because if a marriage has been surrendered to the mission, as we see in this book, boy, God can do so, so much.

Now, it is my firm conviction that we need, as a local church, a season of repentance for making our marriages what they are not supposed to be, and a season of yielding and saying, Lord, this is for you.

It is not for me. It is not for my happiness. All of that I trust to you in your timing. But, Lord, this thing is yours.

Use it to bless your people. Use it to love your church. Use it in your plan to bless your name for all of eternity.

[36 : 13] deity. Let's pray. Father God, we just yield to you and your plans.

You have filled our lives with good things, and we, because of indwelling sin, follow the pattern described in Romans, where we worship and serve the creation rather than the creator.

We take the gift and make it about things that are secondary. So we would just say that that temptation exists in every area of our lives, but especially the really, really good ones.

The ones that are just so full and potent with promise and glory. Marriage is that. Love is that. Lord, just together as a congregation this morning, could we just, first of all, if we're able to see that this has been a gift from you, we've allowed, you've given us the ability to serve you with our marriage. Lord, we praise you for that. We direct all glory to you. It's you who will and work in us for your good purpose. But if we're here today and we've lost that plot, we're going to take communion in a moment.

[37 : 41] We're going to be reminded once again of your plan to save us by putting our sin on Jesus Christ, him bearing the penalty for our sin, and giving us his righteousness.

Would you please, even as we take communion today, celebrate the fact that you have revealed what you want out of our marriage or our future marriage.

Thank you for your word. Thank you for your testimonies. Thank you for your statutes. Thank you for your light. And now we ask that, God, you would just absolutely help us to cling fast to this.

I just believe there's so much life to be had, not just for us, but for so many others, if we make our marriage an instrument of your mission. So please, Lord, help us do that.

Please bless us, Lord, as we partake in the table. May your steadfast love and faithfulness come through stronger than ever today. Not just that you have died to save us, but that you're so faithful to correct us and teach us how to use all of the gifts you've given us to serve you and to glorify you.

[38 : 54] We're so grateful that this table represents absolute justification. We are forgiven. You are faithful and just.

When we confess our sins to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, so we do not come to this table in a bashful manner in that respect. Thank you that it's finished, that you've done the work. Lord, knit our hearts closer to your purposes this morning.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.