

Book of Ephesians Bible Study Lesson 20

Ephesians 5:25-33 Questions

The Mystery of Marriage

Introduction

(MacArthur) Life is made meaningful by relationships, the most meaningful of which is that between a man and woman in marriage. Peter called it “the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). Yet the fulfillment of that relationship is vague. A marriage that continually gets better, richer, and more satisfying is rare today.

From many voices today comes the claim that the very institution of marriage has failed to meet people’s needs. But the fact is that it is not a matter of marriage having failed, since marriage has been increasingly avoided. Today, in place of exerting consistent effort and determination to fulfill the commitment it takes to make one’s marriage work, the solution is to bail out.

It does not take boldness to predict what will happen, but only a look at God’s Word. “Realize this, in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power . . . Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13).

Because of the curse on marriage at the Fall and the inclinations of man’s fallen nature and of the world to oppose God’s way, the family has always had difficulty. In the Western culture of our day, however, it is under an onslaught seemingly unlike any other in this society’s history. There is less chance than before of a family’s living together in harmony, love, and mutual respect apart from God’s provision in Christ. As every new corruption appears, a new philosophy arises to justify it. Marriage, along with every other institution and design of God, will be more and more debased, as people go deeper into sexual perversion and selfishness.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in the beautiful harmony and satisfaction of a perfect marriage. When Adam first saw Eve, he immediately recognized her as a perfect companion (Gen. 2:23). He saw no blemishes or shortcomings in her, because both her character and his attitude were pure. There was nothing to criticize in Eve and there was no critical spirit in Adam. Though they were naked, they were not ashamed (vs. 25), because there was no such thing as an evil, impure, or perverse thought.

Man was created first and was given headship over the woman and over creation. But their original relationship was so pure and perfect that his headship

over her was a manifestation of his consuming love for her, and her submission to him was a manifestation of her consuming love for him. No selfishness or self-will marred their relationship. Each lived for the other in perfect fulfillment of their created purpose and under God's perfect provision and care.

Marriage was instituted to procreate mankind, to raise up children to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). It is also for the purpose of companionship, so that man would not be alone (2:18), and for the purpose of sexual fulfillment and pleasure (1 Cor. 7:4-5; Heb. 13:4).

The Fall itself involved a perversion of marital roles, and God's curse because of the Fall also affected marriage. Eve sinned not only in disobeying God's specific command but in acting independently of her husband and failing to consult Adam about the serpent's temptation. Adam sinned not only by disobeying God's command but by succumbing to Eve's leadership, thus failing to exercise his God-given authority. Because of her disobedience, God cursed the woman to pain in childbirth and to a perverted desire to rule over the man. The man was cursed to toil, to difficulty, to frustration in taking sustenance from the land, and to conflict with his wife over her submission. Both were cursed with death as the penalty for their sin (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 5:15-19).

Marriage was corrupted because both the man and the woman twisted God's plan for their relationship. They reversed their roles, and marriage has been a struggle ever since. The unredeemed nature of both men and women is to be self-preoccupied and self-serving---and those characteristics are no basis for harmonious relationships. God's way to successful marriage focuses on what husbands and wives put into it, not on what they can get out of it.

Satan knows by experience that when the home is weakened, all of society is weakened, because the heart of all human relationships is the family. The curse hits mankind at the base of its most needed human relationship, the need for men and women to have each other as helpers suitable for living productive, meaningful, and happy lives on earth. The world, inspired and led by Satan himself, tells us that meaning and happiness are found in serving and indulging self, in being free to express sexual desire however one wants---though promiscuity, unfaithfulness in marriage, partner swapping, homosexuality, bestiality (sexual intercourse between a person and an animal), or any other way. And when men and women take that deceptive bait, they join Satan in undermining and destroying every meaningful and truly satisfying relationship in their lives---sexual as well as all others. And they bring on themselves the destruction and disease that God has ordained as the consequence of such sins.

In Ephesians 5:25-33 Paul continues to describe the godly and moral life of the believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit and who is mutually submissive "in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21). As he has already made clear, God has ordained

the husband to be the head over the wife (Eph. 5:22-24). But the emphasis of the rest of the chapter is not on the husband's authority but on his duty to submit to his wife through his love for her. Verses 25-31 explain the manner of that love and verses 32-33 reveal its motive.

The Manner of Love

Jesus Christ loved the Church before He brought the Church into existence. He chose and loved His own even before the foundation of the world, because God's love is eternally present, having no past and no future. No sinful human being has the capacity to love with the divine fullness and perfection with which Christ loves, and will forever love, the Church. However, because a Christian has Christ's own nature and Holy spirit within him, God thereby provides for husbands to love their wives with a measure of Christ's own kind of love. The husband and wife who submits to the Lord by being filled with His Spirit (Eph. 5:18) are able to love each other with the same kind of love Jesus has for His own bride, the Church. The Lord's pattern of love for His Church is the husband's pattern of love for his wife.

Sacrificial Love:

When Christ came to earth in human form, He knew that He came to be mocked, ridiculed, maligned, rejected, beaten, and crucified. He knew from eternity past what would be demanded of His eternal love if people were to be provided a way of salvation. He gave up His prerogatives as God's Son, not regarding "equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

Because His sacrifice was determined in heaven before a single soul was created, and because every created soul became sinful in Adam's fall and only worthy of death, Jesus' sacrifice was purely of grace (Rom 1:32; 3:10-11, 23; 6:21). Jesus loves and saves because it is His character to be gracious, He loves for His Church to be forgiven, cleansed, and placed within God's kingdom as His own child. He sacrificed not for the lovely or worthy but for the unlovely and unworthy. He loves because it is His nature in love that which He has created and because the objects of His love need to be loved---not because they are attractive or deserve His love. If God loved as the world loves, He could not love a single human being. But in His marvelous graciousness, He loves because He cannot do otherwise.

God can command His own kind of love from those who belong to Him because He has given them the capacity to love as He loves and because His commanded love must, therefore, be a matter of choice (Rom. 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:9; James 2:8; 1 John 3:7, 16-18, 23; 4:7, 11). It is an act of the will as well as of the

heart. And it seems to be a principle that whatever we choose to love and practice loving soon becomes attractive to us. But a Christian's loving with Christ's kind of love is not based on the attractiveness of the one loved but on God's command to love. Loving as Christ loves does not depend in the least on what others are in themselves, but entirely on what we are in Christ.

Where there is need, love acts, with no consideration of deserving or worth (1 John 3:16). God's love is its own justification; and when we love as He loves, our love is also its own justification, because it is like His love. God did not love the world and send His own Son to redeem it because it was worthy of that love. It was totally unworthy of His love; and when His love came in human flesh, the world despised it, rejected it, and threw it back in God's face. Yet Jesus Christ, as God's incarnate love, did not flinch or turn away or become resentful. He preached and taught and bled and died, because that is what divine love demanded.

Love does whatever needs to be done and does not count cost or merit. It reaches out and helps, leads, teaches, warns, or encourages. Whatever is needed it gives. Whether its help is received or rejected, appreciated or resented, love continues as long as the need continues.

Purifying Love:

Divine love does not simply condemn wrong in those loved but seeks to cleanse them from it. Christ's great love for His church does not allow Him to be content with any sin, any moral or spiritual impurity in it. God tells His people, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Is. 1:18). He casts the sins of His forgiven children "into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19), and He forgives their iniquity and remembers their sin no more (Jer. 31:34).

A believer is forgiven every sin the moment he trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. After that initial and full purification from sin, as Jesus explained to Peter as He washed his feet, periodic cleansing is still necessary. "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you" (John 13:10). As we continue to confess our sins, Christ "is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The "word" from Ephesians 5:26 is the agent of this sanctification, the objective of which is a blamelessness and holiness that makes us fit to be presented to Christ as His own beloved and eternal bride, to dwell in His glorious presence forever (Titus 3:5; Rev. 21:1).

Love wants only the best for the one it loves, and it cannot bear for a loved one to be corrupted or misled by anything evil or harmful. When a husband's love for his wife is like Christ's love for His church, he will continually seek to help

purify her from any sort of defilement. He will seek to protect her from the world's contamination and protect her holiness, virtue, and purity in every way.

The gospel truth is that saving grace makes believers holy through the cleansing agency of the Word of God, so that they may be presented to Christ as His pure Bride, forever to dwell in His love. It is with that same purpose and in that same love that husbands are to cultivate the purity, righteousness, and sanctity of their wives.

Caring Love:

For the husband's love for his wife to be like Christ's love for His Body, the Church, it must also be affectionately caring---to the extent that he cares as much for her welfare as he does for the welfare of his own body.

The husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the Church will no more do anything to harm her than he would to harm his own flesh. His desire is to nourish and cherish her just as he nourishes and cherishes his own body---because that is how Christ also does the Church.

When she needs strength, he gives her strength. When she needs encouragement, he gives her that. And so with every other thing she needs. Just as God supplies "all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19), the loving husband seeks to supply all the needs of his wife.

To nourish a wife is to provide for her needs, to give that which helps her grow and mature in favor with God and man. To cherish her is to use tender love and physical affection to give her warmth, comfort, protection, and security. As Christ provides for His Church, so the husband provides for his wife and family.

Christ provides for us as His Church because we are members of His body. Not to provide for His Church would be not to provide for Himself. He shares common life with His Church, and we are members of His body, His flesh and bones, His present incarnation on earth. Paul said, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17).

Unbreakable Love:

For a husband to love his wife as Christ loves His Church he must love her with an unbreakable love. In this direct quotation from Genesis 2:24 Paul emphasized the permanence as well as the unity of marriage. God's standard for marriage did not change from the time of Adam until the time of Paul, and it has not changed to this day.

One of the greatest barriers to successful marriage is the failure of one or both partners to leave their father and mother. In marriage, a new family has begun and the relationships of the former families are to be severed as far as authority and responsibilities are concerned. Parents are always to be loved and

cared for, but they are no longer to control the lives of their children once they are married.

Cleave (*proskallao*) literally means to be glued or cemented together. Husbands and wives are to leave their parents and to cleave to, be cemented to, each other. They break one set of ties as they establish the other, and the second is more binding and permanent than the first.

“I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel” (Mal. 2:16). God has always hated divorce and He will continue to hate it, because it destroys that which He has ordained to be unbreakable. He hates divorce on any terms and for any reason. He will tolerate it in certain instances, and will forgive it, as He will forgive any other sin; but He will never change His hatred for it, just as He will never change His hatred for any other sin.

Husband and wives are not to be quick to divorce each other because of wrongs their spouses have done, not even for unfaithfulness. Just as Christ does not separate Himself from believers who sin against Him, husbands and wives are not to separate themselves from their partners who sin against them. As Christ is always forgiving of believers, husbands and wives should always be forgiving of each other.

Just as the Body of Christ is inseparable, God’s ideal design for marriage is that it be inseparable. As Christ is one with His Church, husbands are one with their wives. Therefore, when a husband harms his wife he harms himself. A husband who violates his marriage violates himself. A husband who destroys his marriage destroys a part of himself.

It is not God’s will that even adultery break the marriage relationship, and that is the message of the book of Hosea. Hosea’s wife, Gomer, was unfaithful in the extreme, not only committing adultery but becoming a prostitute. Yet God’s word to Hosea was to keep loving her and forgiving her. The more she sinned, the more he was to forgive---reflecting God’s gracious forgiveness of His sinning people. Finally, God restored the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, and He gave the promise to Israel, “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily” (Hos. 14:4-5). That is the way God has always loved His people, the way Jesus Christ has always loved His Church, and the way Christian husbands are always to love their wives. The Lord never puts us away.

When a husband sees faults and failures in his wife---even if she is as unfaithful and reckless as Gomer---he should realize that she has not offended him to a fraction of the degree to which he has offended God. God has immeasurably more for to forgive us than we could ever have for which to forgive others.

A man who was afraid that he loved his wife too much was asked if he loved her as much as Christ love the Church. When he answered no, he was told “Then you must love her more.”

The Motive for Loving Your Wife

As Paul has pointed out, marriage is a picture of the Church and its relationship to Christ. This mystery---this magnificent picture that men could never discover and that was unknown to the saints of the Old Covenant but is now revealed---is GREAT! God’s new people, the Church, are brought into His kingdom and His family through faith in Christ. He is the Bridegroom and they are His bride (Rev. 21:9). A husband’s greatest motive for loving, purifying, protecting, and caring for his wife is Christ’s love, purifying, protecting, and caring for His own bride, the Church. Christian marriage is to be loving, holy, pure, self-sacrificing, and mutually submissive because those virtues characterize the relationship of Christ and the Church.

When Christian husbands and wives walk in the power of the Spirit, yield to His Word and His control, and are mutually submissive, they are brought much happiness, their children are brought much blessing, and God is brought much honor.

References:

MacArthur New Testament Commentary Ephesians