

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Marriage
“The Problem of Marriage”
Ephesians 5:21-33
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City! My name is Kevin Haah, and I am the lead pastor here.

We've been going through the book of Ephesians. We now come to the longest text on marriage in the Bible. These 13 verses contain treasures about marriage. We are going to dig into them and see what God has to say about marriage. Why is it important to learn what God says about marriage? The Bible teaches that there are two human institutions that God created: marriage and church. He designed them. So, if we want to know how marriage is supposed to work, we have to see what the inventor of marriage says about marriage.

Also, since we have a lot of single people, I want to touch on why we are going to spend so much time talking about marriage.

One, because we are going through the Book of Ephesians, and it is there. I think it is important to approach the Scriptures as they are given to us instead of trying to figure out what is relevant to us and just study or read those passages. How do we really know what is relevant to us? That's why I like to preach from through the Bible instead of picking out what I, Kevin Haah, believe is relevant to the church. Don't filter the Word of God; let the Word of God filter you.

Two, many of you singles are considering marriage. Some of you have an inordinate amount of desire to be married, so much that you are not happy because you are not married. Some of you have a fear of being married. Some of you have seen bad marriages, maybe of your parents, and have decided not to marry. Your single life is being affected by your view of marriage, and maybe that view is just off from what God says. For example, maybe the over romantic view of marriage is preventing you from getting married. We'll talk about this later. Maybe, you have a traditional view of

marriage, and you think, that's God's design for marriage, and you don't want anything to do with it. Maybe you've been divorced, and your view of marriage is tainted by your experience of marriage. You know, it is much more miserable to be married and be lonely than to be single and lonely. Whatever it is, it is important for single people to get a solid biblical understanding of marriage.

Let's read Ephesians 5:21-33:

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for 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." ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

There is so much really good stuff in here. Some of it is explosive—we'll get to that when we get to it. The five topics we are going to deal with in the series are: (1) the problem of marriage; (2) the purposes of marriage; (3) the oneness of marriage; (4) the priority of marriage; and (5) the roles in marriage. Those are the five topics we are going to deal with from this passage. So, this series will last 4-5 weeks. I am hoping that this series will be a resource to you all now and in the future.

Today, we are going to focus on the problem of marriage. When we talk about the problem of marriage, a lot of people talk about the high divorce rate. Some people say that half of the people who get married will end up in a divorce. I've always been suspicious of this claim because it makes a lot of assumptions which are not provable. But, the reality is that a lot of people are getting divorced. And, a lot of people are living very unhappy lives being married. Even for people who look great on the outside, there may be a lot of misery in the inside. When we look at our parents, many of them got

divorced. But, even if they didn't divorce, there was a lot of unhappiness in the marriage. There is a real problem with marriage.

I want to look at one foundational and underlying problem of marriage that this passage deals with, and we'll look at what this passage says is the solution to that problem. (1) The problem and (2) the solution.

II. What do you think is the most foundational problem of marriage?

What causes more problems in marriage than anything else? There is one problem that is prevalent in every marriage, and it causes friction, it causes communication breakdown, it causes divorces, it causes abuses, it causes complete breakdown. People get really unhappy.

What do you think this problem is? Some say, the fundamental problem is communication skills. Yes, those are very important, but there is something more fundamental.

Some say, the fundamental problem is a lack of romance. That is a problem but there is something more fundamental.

Some say it is financial. People often quote stats that show that financial strain is the biggest cause of divorce. But, we know many people who are very poor but have a happy and successful marriage.

Some say it is compatibility. But we've all seen people who appear to be very compatible with one another but something happens in their marriage, and there is a breakdown.

Some say it is the biblical role. Wives are not submitting and husbands are not leading and loving. But, there is a more fundamental problem than that.

What does this passage say is the most fundamental problem of marriage? Verse 21 says "Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ." For some reason, if you have NIV, the editors put verse 21 under the last section entitled "Living as Children of Light" and start a new section in verse 22 called "Wives and Husbands." Verse 22 starts out by saying, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." If you look at the Greek, and this is important, verses 21 and 22 are in the same sentence, not two different sentences or even two different paragraphs. There is no verb in verse 22. The editors

have this word “submit” inserted. So, this sentence literally says “submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord.” Most scholars and commentators point that out. The first command that Paul gives regarding marriage is “to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The first command is not for wives to submit to the husband, it is for both husband and wives to submit to each other, and the secondary and subsidiary command is for wives to submit to their husbands. We’ll look at the second issue later when we get to the issue of roles in marriage.

Now, what does it mean to submit to one another in marriage? To submit is to release your control; it is to release your rights; it is to defer to the other person, to be flexible; it means to subject yourself to someone else’s desires. It means to *not* focus on our own desires but defer to the other person. So, when the Scripture tells us to submit to one another as the first thing before anything else is discussed about marriage, it is assuming that the heart of the problem is the opposite of submitting to one another: Seeking to get your own way; seeking control; demanding your rights; getting the other person to defer to you; focusing on your desires. In other words, *self-centeredness*. It is the essence of sin. If you look at any marriage problem, there may be a lot of symptoms but the root cause of all marital problems is self-centeredness.

I think when we first get married, many of us have no idea how self-centered we are. When the focus of our love is our own happiness, we are self-focused. When people talk about love, they are often saying things like: “you make me happy, you make me feel secure, you make me feel wanted, you make me want to jump with joy. I love you.” If you think about it, many wedding vows or confessions of love sound like this. What you are really saying is that I love the way you make me feel, and the other side of that same coin is that if you don’t make me feel that way anymore, it’s going to be hard to feel love for you.

Then, when we get married, we really find out how self-centered we are. When we live by ourselves, we don’t really know it. Even when we lived with our roommates, they never really told us, unless we had really close friends who knew us enough to tell us how selfish we were. People don’t confront us. They just go on to other people. They move away from us. They don’t have to deal with us if they don’t want to. But, if we are

married, after a while, they tell us how selfish we are. You tell each other that. They get into fights, they get hurt, but the truth is often told. And it's painful.

Before I was married, I thought I was a nice guy; but after I got married, I realized I was not as nice as I thought I was. I was not as considerate as I thought I was. It took me a long time to ask Grace if she wanted something to drink when I was pouring a glass for myself (because I was only focused on my own needs). My inconsiderateness came to light because I was only thinking about myself. My insensitivity came to light because I was too absorbed in my own thoughts. My laziness came to light because I was only concerned about my own comfort. My hypocrisy came to light because I was only concerned about my own image. My sins came to light because I was self-centered. The Bible teaches that we are naturally self-focused. We are instinctively selfish. We are born with a sinful nature. And this sin produces all kinds of issues in marriage.

Thinking that we are not self-focused or sinful is a key problem to marriage. When we do that, we just focus on the other person's selfishness, sinfulness, impurity, inconsiderateness, insensitivity. Everything is about fixing the other person. We have to realize our own selfishness, turn away, and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The world does not like to talk about sin. They blame environments. They blame the family. They blame the upbringing, temperament, addiction, dysfunctional families, the child within, codependency, whatever. And we bring that mindset right into the marriage. We have a tendency to blame things rather than admit to our self-centeredness. While these things are legitimate factors, they are not the underlying cause. They may be a part of why we are who we are. But, we have to admit to our core sinfulness. We have to stop denying the darkness of our hearts, the manipulative tendencies of our hearts, the impurities of our heart. If we are able to admit to our sinfulness, our self-centeredness, we can start working on ourselves. Otherwise, we are always going to think that the problem is the other person.

If you look at 1 Timothy 1:15-16, Paul says:

¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display

his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

He says he is the worst of sinners. He uses present tense. “I am the worst.” If I accept this saying as trustworthy—once I know that I am indeed the worst of sinners, then my spouse is no longer my biggest problem: *I am*. And when I find myself walking in the shoes of the worst of sinners, I will make every effort to grant my spouse the same lavish grace that God has granted me.

Have you ever asked this question? “If I love my spouse, why do I find it so easy to treat him or her like I don’t?” The answer is that we are all the worst of sinners. When we began to see our own sinfulness, we will stop the denials, and see God, ourselves, and marriage with the true reality of God.

Here is the bottom line: we can’t solve the problem of marriage until we acknowledge the problem of marriage. We are the worst of sinners, and so is our spouse. If we are not so perfect, we can’t expect our spouse to be. You’ll be able to demonstrate more grace.

III. Then, what is the solution to this problem of self-centeredness? How can we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ?

Let’s go back to Ephesians 5. I need to explain to you the structure of this paragraph in the original language. The sentence actually started in verse 18. The main verse of this sentence is, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Then, there are four participles that describe the verb, “be filled.” Participles are descriptive verbs. So what happens when you are filled with the Spirit?

- Verse 19: *speaking* to one another with Psalms etc.
- Verse 19b: *singing* and making music in your hearts to the Lord
- Verse 20: *giving* thanks to God the Father for everything
- Verse 21: *submitting* to one another

So, the passage is saying that when we are filled the Spirit, we speak praise, we sing and make music, we give thanks, and we submit to one another.

So, if submitting to one another is the consequence of being filled with the Spirit, what is the solution to this problem of self-centeredness? How can we submit to one another?

By being filled with the Spirit.

What is being filled with the Spirit?

It is living in life saturated in God's love for us.

It is not a life of performance, law, and trying to earn respect, to be someone, to prove your worth. It is not a life of moralism. If we did live like that, and we already know that we are the worst of sinners, it would be pretty depressing. The reason people have a violent reaction to the idea that we are all really messed up is that they live by the principles of the world, so it would be too sad and depressing to face the truth.

It is life in God's unconditional love for us. That despite our sins, we are treasured as His child, that he loves us more than we can ever imagine. He loved us so much that he came in the person of Jesus Christ and died for our sins. He paid the penalty of our sins. He suffered the penalty of our sins. If we don't think we are self-centered people, we don't really appreciate his grace in our lives. We don't appreciate the Spirit of God coming into our lives and filling us with his love. We don't realize his amazing love for us. It is living our lives saturated with his presence, and letting His presence change us, heal us, make us whole.

When we get life, love, unconditional love, grace, beauty, and all the stuff that our soul hungers for primarily from God, we don't end up trying to suck life out of our spouses. We don't get as demanding. The irony is that when we try to get life out of each other, we actually destroy the relationship. Marriage is not the ultimate life receiving source; it is God himself who is the ultimate source. The high expectations that one messed up sinner has of another messed up sinner of what only God can give leads inevitably to disappointments.

When we are getting life from the Spirit of God, being filled with his love and presence, that's the power for change. That's how we overcome. That's how we can submit to one another. And when we submit to one another, our marriage will have power.

IV. Practical Tips

Let's try to take this for a drive:

When you have a conflict with your spouse:

(1) suspect and inspect yourself first. Remember, you are the worst of sinners.

You inspect yourself. Don't jump to fix your spouse first. Assess yourself first. Look for sin behind the sin. Look for idols in your life. Repent. Admit your self-centeredness.

(2) Seek the presence and the filling of the Spirit. Don't live under the old covenant of the law. Move towards the arena of grace, power, joy—the arena of the Spirit. Get life from God. Forgive the wrongs of the other. Pray for them. Give. Be flexible. Submit to your spouse. Become willing to give.