

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Marriage
“The Purpose of Marriage”
Ephesians 5:21-33
September 5, 2010
by Kevin Haah



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. .

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.

The five topics we are going to deal with in the series are: (1) the problem of marriage; (2) the purpose of marriage; (3) the design/oneness of marriage; (4) the priority of marriage; and (5) the roles of marriage.

II. Summary of the Problem of Marriage.

Last Sunday, we looked at the problem of marriage. Verse 21 says “**Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.**” 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 *self-centeredness*. 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.

People who are living by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit do not insist on getting their own way. They are not self-centered. You know why? What is the reason for our self-centeredness? We feel a sense of need in our hearts. We have a need for physical comfort, for approval, for affirmation, for security, for love, for significance, for a sense that we are somebody. The Bible tells us that we all have this need. So, we negotiate to fulfill this need. Outside of God, as an adult, marriage is the best place to negotiate to fill this need in our lives. However, if we are living by the Spirit, if we are filled with the Spirit, we are getting life from God. We are getting our sense of approval, affirmation, security, love, significance from God. We don't earn it, but we are given it by grace. When we are filling this fundamental need with God (and I know that it's not an all or nothing kind of thing; it is something we have to discipline ourselves to do), then we are able to focus on giving. That's the solution to the problem of our self-centeredness. Unless you let your fundamental need be met by the only one who can fulfill it for you, you will go on expecting, negotiating for, and sometimes demanding that your spouse fill that need.

Now, I want to answer some questions you might have about this before I go on.

What if the other person is much much more self-centered?

I'll address this later more fully, but for now, I want to challenge you to consider your own faults, your own idols, your own self-centeredness, even if your spouse is more self-centered. Addressing your issues first can result in your demonstrating more grace to your spouse, giving him or her more than he or she deserves. Grace, combined with lots of prayers and conversations, and sometimes even gentle confrontations, can start a virtuous cycle in the marriage. The other alternative is to condition your actions of love based on your spouse's actions of love. Since your spouse is a sinner like you, you are likely to fail, and end up in a vicious cycle of sin in the marriage.

Also, I want to make sure we get past denying our own need to get our own way. I think what we often do is to mistaken our own tendencies and preferences as needs. I heard about this one guy who grew up in a very orderly household. He had sock drawers coordinated by colors. His wife grew up in a household without sock drawers. When they married, he couldn't understand how one could not have a sock drawer. She mixed things up a little and put them away in a convenient way. He found himself getting annoyed really fast. He felt a need for everything to be orderly. His whole life approach was like this. He argued that God is the God of order, and he had theological arguments for it. He argued to his wife that people who are orderly control the world, but she countered and said that that might be true but they don't enjoy it. He came to realize the disruption of order actually incited anger and anxiety in his life. Over a period of time, he came to realize that his need for order was really a part of his self-centeredness. It was not wrong to desire order in his life, but to convert it to a need that must be met was a part of his self-centeredness. We have to distinguish between real needs that your spouse can help to meet, and preferences that must be put in their rightful place. When you put your preferences and desires, which are good, and overdesire them or put them in the position of a need that must be met, you've just created an idol that can destroy your marriage. What you need to do is to acknowledge your preference as just a preference, and put it in its place. Don't demand it. Release the idol. And submit to your spouse out of reverence for Christ!

III. What is the Purpose of Marriage?

I want to go on to what this passage teaches us about the purpose of marriage. If we really want to understand anything, we have to know the purpose of that thing. What is the purpose of marriage? Why did you get married? Why do you want to get married or why don't you want to get married?

In the olden times and in some cases now, the purpose of marriage was security. I don't think this is as ancient as it seems. People still get married for the financial and emotional security that marriage provides.

Getting married for love is a more recent idea. "We're in love; we're happy, and so, we are going to get married." We get married based on the assumption that this love,

which we basically define as a strong emotional attraction, a strong physical sensation in the pit of the stomach, is something that will continue to give us happiness for the rest of our lives. So, most people would tell you that the purpose of marriage is to find happiness.

While you may find security and happiness in marriage, the biblical purpose of marriage is much deeper than either one of these two.

What does today's passage tell us that the purpose of marriage is?

Ephesians 5:25-28 says:

25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her
26to (hina—in order to) make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through
the word, 27and to (hina--in order to) present her to himself as a radiant church, without
stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but (hina—in order to be) holy and blameless. 28In
this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his
wife loves himself.

This passage is drawing an analogy between our relationship with Jesus and the relationship between a husband and a wife. It says that Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (there is unconditional love, there is love for us even though we are selfish and he is not, there is a sacrificial love, there is love that puts us first and was willing to suffer). **Why did Christ give himself up for us?** Verse 26: in order to: make us holy, cleansing us by the washing with water through the word. To cleanse us. To get us to be holy, to be adopted as sons and daughters of God, to be accepted by God. Verse 27: in order to present us to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle—perfect (to be his bride—the church is his bride). The book of Revelations is the only other place in the Bible where the church is called the bride of Christ. In Revelations 21:2, it says: **“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”** New Jerusalem, the New City (this is where we get our name) is the church, and it is called the bride of Christ, prepared as a beautiful bride. And then, the Ephesians passage in Verse 27b says: in order to be holy and blameless. It is saying that Christ gave himself for us unconditionally when we didn't deserve it. (In fact, if you look at the Old Testament about the imagery of God being the husband and Israel being the wife, there is a powerful imagery in the Book of Hosea. God tells Hosea

to marry a harlot, a prostitute. So, he marries her but she goes around sleeping with other men. And God is trying to say that he is the husband, and Israel is the unfaithful wife. God came down and gave himself up for us (the unfaithful, self-centered, harlot)). But, his purpose was not just to save us from the consequences of sin, he wanted to lead us through a journey towards wholeness, to holiness. That's what he is doing in our lives.

Then, Paul says, in the same way, husbands ought to love their wives.

In essence, the passage is telling us that the relationship between a husband and wife is *gospel reenactment*. We are to reenact the relationship between Jesus and us in our marriage. There are three realities in that relationship: (1) we are messed up and sinful; (2) he loves us unconditionally—he gave himself for us to forgive us; (3) he leads us on a journey of transformation so that we may ultimately become holy and blameless.

There are three same realities in our marital relationships: (1) you and your spouse are self-centered; (2) despite your self-centeredness, you are learning to love your spouse self-sacrificially and unconditionally; and (3) this helps you and your spouse go on a journey of transformation and help each other become like Christ. In other words, ***the purpose of marriage is to help each other become Christ-like or holy through self-sacrificial love and service.***

Now, let me stop right here. When I say that, the first thing you think about is how you can help your spouse change. That's good, but the first thing we must think about is how we can change ourselves to better love our spouse. That's the focus. If we can learn how to love our spouses self-sacrificially, we will become more Christ-like. What is at the heart of agape love—Christ-like love? It is learning to love our sinner spouse just as Christ loves us. Christ loves us no matter what, and in the same way, we must love our spouses no matter what. We must demonstrate absolute commitment, love, based not on how we feel, but based on our commitment to our spouse in front of God. The Scriptures tell us that God loved us first while we were still sinners. In the same way, we ought to love our spouses while they are still sinners. It's easy to love people who are completely loving to us; but we are called to love even when our spouse is insensitive, hurtful, temperamental, and not as nice. Yes, it's true. Learning to love a sinner is a vehicle for sanctification.

To love our spouses also means to help them change.

How do you help your spouse change?

A. First, you help your spouse change the way God changes us.

I know a guy who tried to get his wife to change. Right after they got married, he was working but she was not; for the first few weeks of marriage, she didn't keep the house as clean as he wanted. She was actually going through a difficult time adjusting to marriage. But, he decided to help her become more diligent. So, before he went to work, he started to write a list of things he wanted her to do that day. This list created a lot of resentment on her part. He decided to help her change by controlling her and essentially demanding it. That didn't work. That's not how God leads us to change. And God doesn't lead us to change by scaring us to change; he doesn't do it by nagging us to change; he doesn't do it by demanding change.

There was another couple having marital difficulties. They decided to go to see a pastor for counseling. The pastor asked what the problem was. The wife spilled the beans and laid out all of the things that the husband did that bothered her: "I don't like the way he flirts with other women; I don't like his long hours; I don't like the way he talks to me; I don't like his attitude towards me; he is not as loving as he used to be; he doesn't help out in the home as much as he should." She said that she couldn't live with him anymore. She couldn't take it anymore. She said that unless he changed, she would leave. The husband got scared and committed to change. In fact, fear drove him to change. He stopped doing whatever he was doing. He stopped for a while but when the crisis was over, when he no longer feared that she would leave, he slipped back to the same routine that bothered her.

You can't change a person by demanding change. You can't change by threatening him or her. The only way to change is the way God changes us. *He served us and loved us when we didn't deserve to be served and loved. This self-sacrificial love moves our heart and changes our lives.*

How do we apply this in our marriage? We don't have to think in dramatic terms. We need to think in everyday terms.

I think it is generally changing our mindset, our approach towards each other.

It is so easy to have a consumer attitude about marriage. What do I get out of this marriage? I'll be the person I ought to be in marriage IF you become the person you

ought to be. How is this marriage going to make me feel more secure? How is this marriage going to make me happier? How much freedom is this going to cost me?

But, if you understand the purpose of marriage as God designed it, you will approach marriage with a servant mindset. How can I love you more? How can I encourage you more? What can I do to help you maximize your God-given potential? How can I fully empower you? How can I help you become more fully the person God intended you to be? How can I help you grow in Christ? That's gospel reenactment. It is God's Agape love, God's self-sacrificial love in action.

One of the things that I encourage when I officiate a wedding is for the couple to hold a private foot washing ceremony before they consummate the marriage the night of their wedding. Foot washing is a great illustration of the agape love in action. It is putting yourself low to serve the other person. We need to approach marriage as a way to serve and through serving, making the other person clean. Sometimes, serving them means to forgive them. Sometimes, serving them means to confront them. Sometimes, serving them means to get a glass of water for them. Sometimes, serving them means to listen to them. Sometimes, serving them means to touch them and embrace them and be sensitive to them. Sometimes, serving them means to just spend time with them. Sometimes, serving them means to give up on your compulsive nature, holding your tongue. Sometimes, serving means to come home early. Sometimes, serving means to do the laundry. Sometimes, serving means to buy a thoughtful gift.

Now, I am not saying that you should just be passive and serve your spouse in such a way as to enable his or her selfishness or destructive behavior. To truly serve and help your spouse, you would have to lovingly confront him or her, pray for your spouse, and encourage your spouse however you can towards spiritually healthy behavior. This is also love in action.

B. The second way to help your spouse change is by bringing him or her to God, who can change him or her.

This means you need to help your spouse come to God's grace. Often times, our spouse is depressed, distressed, stressed. We can't help them directly, but we can bring them to Jesus. We can affirm God's love in their lives. We can preach the gospel to our spouses—yes, we are sinful but God loves us more than we can imagine. We can affirm

their identity in Christ. We can affirm God's grace. We can affirm God's presence in the midst of the most difficult time.

We can also help our spouse identify idols. You need to look deeply into each other motives, and speak the truth to each other. Maybe money has become an idol, maybe success, maybe approval, maybe even family. Spouses must help each other identify the idols and pray together about them, help each other come nearer to God.

When I work crazy hours, Grace reminds me that God calls us to minister to our family first. Sometimes, when I don't get it, she gets emotional and becomes emphatic. My idol can often become work, so Grace protects me from that idol.

This means we encourage each other to practice God's presence in our lives through worship, prayer, Bible study, meditation, etc. We use the spiritual practices that help us discover ourselves, particularly our idols and sins that come from the way we have chased our idols, and discovering God's grace, love, affirmation for us. We have to help each other discover this gracious God.

C. Some Questions

1. *"I thought love means we are supposed to accept each other as he or she is. I don't get this thing about helping each other become a better person?"*

Yes, accepting each other unconditionally and loving them; but that does not mean you leave them where they are. If you love someone, you are not going to accept their destructive behavior. You don't go, yeah, he's a drug addict. I just have to accept him for who he is. No, he's going to kill himself. He is going to destroy everything. You help him. You love him. The gospel says that we are accepted no matter what. Our acceptance is based solely on his grace and love. In the same way, the gospel says we are called to accept each other no matter what, even if the other person is an addict; but, it calls us to spur one another to grow. It calls us to maturity. It calls us to sanctification and holiness. It sometimes calls us to the hard work of love.

One thing we have to be careful not to do is to think that we can change what we don't like about the other person after we get married. Often times, we can't. We must be willing to love that person as he or she is. We have to be careful not to expect change in order to fulfill our self-centered expectations.

2. *“It seems a little dry to think that the purpose of marriage is holiness. I want to be married because I love him, for love’s sake. It’s so unromantic!”*

Well, romantic love, *eros*, is not mentioned in the NT. Romantic love is not the foundation of marriage. Romantic love is essentially a feeling. Feelings come and go. Christian marriage is not based on a feeling. I know that when you get married, or when you are dating, it is impossible for you to think that this love (this feeling) will go away, but I am telling you that it comes and goes. I think it is really important to sustain this romantic love in marriage, but that’s not the purpose of marriage. Christian marriage is essentially a commitment to love, and the love that this passage uses is not a feeling, it is an action. How can the Bible command us to agape our enemy if it is a feeling? That’s impossible! It is a decision that we make, and as we do so, we create the foundation for a lasting emotional attachment and love. One is the foundation and the other is built on it. The mistake that many of us make is to think that romantic love is the foundation, and we build agape love on top of that. So, when romantic love is gone, or we don’t feel like we used to feel, we feel like the marriage is gone. No, it is not gone. You have some serious building to do, but the marriage is not gone. If you keep to the foundation of commitment to reenact the gospel, you can build romantic love again.

D. Where do you get the power to live like this?

You have to experience the gospel. Unless you experience the depth of God’s love, you can’t give love. Unless you get so saturated with the power of self-sacrificial love, and see the transforming power in your life, you will not love in that way. You will resort to the old ways, and you’ll end up in a vicious cycle. But, if you live in the Spirit (explain this?), you will experience his presence and grace every day of your life. Then, you will be able to agape your spouse into holiness.