

Marriage: God's Design and Sin's Corruption

Ephesians 5:22-33

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.

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. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 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 am 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. – Eph. 5:22-33, ESV

We're going to be approaching this text a little differently than we have done with the rest of Ephesians. Partly because of our culture and partly because of the text itself, we need to take a slightly different approach. In his teaching on marriage, Paul appeals to the relationship between Christ and the church as the model for husbands and wives. Then, toward the end of this section, he quotes from Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Then he immediately says, *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."*

In the context of Ephesians, the word "mystery" means something of profound spiritual significance which was hidden for a long time but finally has been revealed in Christ. Here, Paul is saying that marriage itself is such a mystery. Appealing back to the institution of marriage by God at the very beginning, Paul says that the creation of marriage is a spiritual mystery that, in its deepest significance, refers to Christ and the church.

In saying this, Paul is not just saying that Christ's love for the church as His bride provides the model for marriage, but even more profoundly, that marriage itself was instituted by God to reveal to us the significance of Christ's relationship to His church. Thus, teaching about marriage has importance for all Christians – married or unmarried – because it shows us Christ and His relationship to the church.

To fully understand this, we're going to have to go back to the beginning to God's creation of marriage. As we do so, we'll look at it through the teaching of Jesus, who also quoted Genesis 2:24 in His teaching about marriage. We will then see how the fall into sin affected marriage and how sin continues to corrupt marriage today. And then we'll see how God began to redeem the institution of marriage even in the Old Testament, as He took a bride to Himself, in the people of Israel.

Introduction: When God Said, "It is not good"

If we go all the way back to the beginning and look at Genesis 1, we'll see that God pronounces His creation "good" seven times – once on each of the first five days and then twice on day 6, once after the creation of animals and again at the end of the day, after the creation of man. In fact, at the end, God says that His creation is not only "good" but "very good."

Then, Genesis 2 gives us a closer look at God's creation of man, and here we see God say for the first and only time before the fall that something was "not good." In Genesis 2:18, God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." It is significant that God says this and not Adam. Adam doesn't complain to God or pester God, but God sees what is not good and He decides to make it right.

And so we read on in Genesis 2:21-24:

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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 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.*

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Commenting on the creation of woman, Matthew Henry, the most famous Bible commentator in the history of the English language, said in 1708:

Yet man being made last of the creatures, as the best and most excellent of all, Eve's being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex, as the glory of the man. If man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one remove further from the earth. . .

the woman was made out of a rib from the side of Adam, not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved. . .

And then what Matthew Henry says is still more profound: “Adam was a figure of him that was to come; for out of the side of Christ, the second Adam, his spouse the church was formed, when he slept the sleep, the deep sleep, of death upon the cross, in order to which his side was opened, and there came out blood and water, blood to purchase his church and water to purify it to himself.”

I. God's Design of Marriage

A. “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female . . .” – Jesus, Matthew 19:4

God's original creation design of marriage was upheld by Jesus Himself when He was asked about marriage and divorce. In Matthew 19:3-6, we read this exchange:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (ESV)

Notice that for Jesus, marriage is directly tied to God's creation of humanity as male and female. Jesus is making a passing reference to Genesis 1 before He directly quotes Genesis 2:24. It is in Genesis 1:26-28

that the Pharisees would have read about the fact that “he who created them from the beginning made the male and female,” and here’s what those verses say:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:26-28, ESV)

These verses were a radical statement of the full equality of women in the ancient world. In the cultural context in which Moses wrote Genesis, only the Pharaoh in Egypt was considered “the image of the gods on earth.” The Hebrew people, who had grown up in Egypt, would have immediately associated the idea of the image of God with Pharaoh.

Moses was telling the people the truth from God, which was that all people - male and female – were made in the image of God. Male and female are different but equal. Marriage is the one-flesh union between two people who are, in many ways, very different from each other in nature and aspect and yet are both fully human, fully made in the image of God and full equals before God.

Marriage is a union rooted in our maleness and femaleness, which is why, very quickly after redefining marriage so as to eliminate the need for male and female in marriage, the very definitions and concepts of “male” and “female” are being thrown out entirely. Gender identity and marriage are inseparably interwoven, which is exactly what Jesus Himself said and what we find clearly in Genesis 1 and 2.

Furthermore, there is no way for the church to “set aside” these clear teachings from Genesis and from Jesus without throwing out the very essence of what God says about our humanity.

B. Flesh of my flesh – Adam, Gen. 2:23

Notice now the verse before Genesis 2:24, verse 23, where Adam speaks about his newly created wife. He says:

*“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.*

It is this ecstatic, celebratory utterance from Adam at the sight of Eve that is the causal foundation of the “Therefore” that begins verse 24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In other words, a man and his wife become one flesh, spiritually but truly, because God made Eve from the rib of Adam.

Because Adam could say, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” marriage was established as a one-flesh absolute bond between a man and his wife. The wife becomes essential and core to the man’s very self-identity, which is why “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.” His family identity has changed because his very self-identity has changed. Before a man gets married, if someone asks him about his family, he talks about his family of origin, but after he gets married, he talks about his wife and then later about his children.

C. The two shall become one flesh. – Paul, Eph. 5:31, quoting Gen. 2:24

And when we look back at Ephesians 5, we see Paul making the same connection, emphasizing the same truth, before he takes it one step further to apply it to Christ and the church:

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 am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (vv. 30-32)

We in the church are the members of Christ's body. This is not just a metaphor useful for illustrating the diversity of spiritual gifts – why one person is a hand and another an ear and still another an eye. No, it is a profound spiritual truth. This is why Jesus had to be fully man, a real and true human being with a real human nature. He had to be made like us if we were going to be made His body. That's also why His side needed to be split open, so we would see the truth that He is our Adam and our husband.

We'll explore this relationship more next week, but I want to emphasize for a moment that Matthew Henry's language that I read earlier was not just poetic license. Jesus had to become fully human – bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh – so that we could become His body – bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. He also has to shed His blood to forgive and cleanse us from our sins, which Paul references in Ephesians 5 and which we'll come back to next week.

Only Jesus' sacrificial death for us can cleanse us of our sin, and we need to be forgiven and cleansed of our sin because sin affects everything in our lives, corrupting and polluting all of our relationships, bringing brokenness, alienation and isolation into our relationship with God, all of our relationships with other and even into our relationship with ourselves. And so we should not be surprised that sin has deeply and profoundly marred the closest relationship we enjoy with another human being, marriage.

II. Sin's Corruption of Marriage

A. God's Creation Order Inverted in the Fall

Sin's corruption of marriage began even before Eve took the first bite of the forbidden fruit. Marriage is a key centerpiece of God's created order. God created men and women to rule over all creation in loving partnership. Within the loving partnership of marriage- a relationship between equals- the wife is to be under the husband's authority and protection. But in the temptation scene, we see Eve having a dialogue with the serpent while her husband is either absent or silent.

By the time Eve makes the decision to eat the fruit, we know Adam is present and passively silent. So, the serpent – a created creature and part of the nature over which Adam and Eve were to exercise dominion – controlled and ruled Adam and Eve instead and did so by undermining Adam's authority and removing Eve from Adam's protection. God's created order is inverted and marriage is attacked in the very

temptation itself.

B. The Curse:

And then, later in Genesis 3, when God pronounces His curses that come as a result of the fall into sin, the marriage relationship is explicitly cursed. In Genesis 3:16, God says:

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.” (ESV)*

Here, we see that, for Eve, sin has corrupted both the joy of childbearing and the intimacy of marriage. Childbearing will now be painful and dangerous for women, and marriage will be a power-struggle instead of a loving partnership.

The nature of the curse on marriage is better understood if we look ahead to Genesis 4 and the words God speaks to Cain as a warning, just before Cain kills Abel: “The LORD said to Cain, *“Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”* (Genesis 4:6-7, ESV) In Genesis 4, it is clear that Cain is locked in a deadly power-struggle with sin, one that he would lose. But God describes this power struggle in exactly the same way that he described the cursed marriage to Eve: *“Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”*

I. Your desire will be for your husband

And so “Your desire shall be for your husband” is not an expression of loving desire, but rather a desire to possess and control. The wife’s desire under her sinful nature is to “own” her husband, in a controlling and even manipulative way.

2. He will rule over you

And likewise “He will rule over you” is not an expression of the loving, protecting, nurturing authority Adam was given before the fall into sin, but is a harsh and tyrannical rule, an oppressive and dehumanizing reign.

These two lines of the curse given to Eve express the origin and the heart of the “battle of the sexes.”

Are husbands and wives able to have loving, harmonious marriages after the fall? Sure, it’s possible, just as some women give birth with relatively less pain, or a higher tolerance for the pain, than others. Some marriages are easier and some are harder, and there are steps that can be taken to help ease the conflict and create more harmony. But the reality of two sinners living in such a close relationship is that the marriage will often be a power-struggle, a fight for dominance and control. Both husbands and wives will choose to exercise the power God has given them – which, for men, tends to be more physical and for women tends to be more verbal and emotional – to try to control and dominate the other.

It takes God’s grace – often in very large measure – to overcome these natural, sinful patterns in marriage relationships. Thankfully, marriage is something God is very much committed to redeeming.

C. Corruption of Marriage:

But not only are individual marriage relationships corrupted by the fall, but the institution of marriage is corrupted by human society as well. This is nothing new.

I. By society

Society has corrupted marriage most commonly in history through polygamy and divorce. These have traditionally both been structured in ways that benefit men and hurt women. So, later in Genesis 4, we see in the fifth generation from Cain, Lamech becomes the first recorded polygamist, taking two wives, Adah and Zillah. He is also a violent man and a murderer, which should tell you what God thinks of polygamy. We should also note that no one on Seth’s line, all the way down to Noah, was recorded to be a polygamist.

But the other common corruption of marriage by society was divorce. When divorce laws in America were loosened in the 1960's and 70's, the divorce rate skyrocketed, more than doubling in a 15-year period from 1965 to 1980. Overall, the number of adults who experienced a divorce quadrupled from 1970 to the year 2000. But divorce was not an American invention, and America is not the only country to have a widespread culture of divorce.

In Jesus' day, Jewish men were allowed to divorce their wives for any reason at all – but only the men were allowed to divorce their wives. In fact, when Jesus gave His strong teaching against divorce in Matthew 19, His disciples responded by saying, ““If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus' male disciples didn't like the idea of being trapped in a relationship commitment they couldn't escape whenever they wanted.

Only very recently, American and European societies have discovered a new way to corrupt marriage, unheard of before in the thousands of years that people all over the world have been getting married: Separating marriage from gender and re-defining marriage to be a relationship between two adults of any gender. This step redefines the meaning of a marriage union in profound ways, most centrally by removing it from the possibility of being fruitful and multiplying, at least in any natural sense.

Separating marriage from gender also separates it from procreation, but in practical reality, the separation from procreation came long before the separation from gender. It really had to be accomplished first, so that any argument about there being a connection between marriage and childbearing was almost laughable when it was presented before the Supreme Court.

2. By individuals

But we need to be careful to avoid the trap of blaming “society” for the corruption of marriage. Society is made up of individuals and no one can corrupt marriage more than individual human beings making sinful, selfish choices. The individual making these corrupting choices may be Lamech inventing polygamy or it may be you and I making selfish, petty choices to corrupt our marriages and make them look less like God's original created intention and more like the corruption of the curse.

III. God Takes a Bride – Israel

Wow! We surely have gone down the rabbit hole into some pretty bad stuff today. Sadly, that is life under the curse. Our hearts are born corrupted by sin and we add to that corruption every day of our lives. What we need in the face of such bleakness is redemption! We need God to redeem by grace what we have broken and corrupted by sin and sin's curse.

Thankfully, God has done that! He began to redeem marriage in the Old Testament in two ways: by setting limits for His people in the Law and by taking a bride to Himself and modeling the true love of a good husband in His relationship with His people.

In the Law, God protected women from abuse by men in two profound ways:

1. He required a man to marry a woman he slept with and whose virginity he took. This protected a woman from being “defiled” by a man and then abandoned by the man who had defiled her.
2. By restricting the grounds for which a man could divorce his wife and also requiring him to give her a certificate of divorce. Under the Law of God, a man could only divorce His wife if He could prove that she had been unfaithful to Him or had not been a virgin when they got married, and she had claimed to be. In these cases, the husband was still required to give her a certificate of divorce, which protected her in many ways. Now, over time, the men of Israel loosened the grounds for divorce to include almost anything, but that's not how God Himself gave His Law to them.

In His relationship with Israel, God also began redeeming marriage, by showing the loving commitment and gracious leadership of a good husband to His people. We don't have time to explore this in detail this morning, but you can study the Prophet Hosea and Ezekiel 16 for wonderful pictures of this relationship – both of which I wish we had time to explore, but we don't.

Instead, we'll close with a few verses from Ezekiel 16, which is an allegory of God's relationship with Israel:

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God. (vv. 8-14, ESV)

What a beautiful picture of the kind of love a husband should have for his wife, a love that is for the bride, that protects, cherishes and advances his wife. This is the model for all godly husbands and we'll explore this redemptive love more deeply next week.