

## The Sacred Symbolism of Marriage

*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*  
(Eph 5:31-33)

Having dealt with the role of the wife, and the role of the husband, Paul ended by saying that we are essentially part of Christ's Body, spiritually speaking, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh. That causes him to remember the quote from Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Gen 2:24)*

This is the heart of marriage, one man, one woman, leaving the authority of their parents, to begin a new family, cleaving to one another in total unity. Here Paul says, 'This is a great mystery' – this is a profound mystery, but I am actually speaking of Christ and the church. This leaving and cleaving of marriage is sacred symbolism, and it is the closest possible symbol of Jesus Christ's relationship with His people. It is perhaps the best possible picture of salvation that the world can see.

There is the leaving- a picture of repentance, leaving the old authority. There is the cleaving – a picture of faith, embracing Christ as Lord and Saviour. From that day, there is a picture of increasing oneness, unity that grows and grows. We are to become more like Christ, so as to know and love Him, and be even more pleasing to Him, until that day that we are presented to Him spotless. This theme of oneness with Jesus Christ runs deep in the Scriptures.

*"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. "(Joh 17:21-26)*

So marriage is a picture of the romance between Christ and His people. He seeks us out. We respond. There is a leaving of the old, and a cleaving to Him. The bond is sealed, and we are His, growing and maturing to be more and more one with Him.

But of all the possible pictures in the world, marriage is the one most under attack. Since it is the clearest picture of Christ and His love for His people, you can be sure it is the one Satan will attack most. Here is how it is being attacked today:

- 1) **Immorality.** Sex before marriage, living together before marriage does not portray Christ and the church. Christ is not a thief; He secures our love as it is given by the Father. He does not take us before the time, nor does Jesus return for us before the marriage supper of the Lamb. Pre-marital sex warps the picture of Jesus and His Bride betrothed to each other, and waiting in purity for one another. Simply living together does not picture Jesus and His Bride. Marriage is a covenant, not an arrangement. Christ entered into a covenant with His people signed in His own blood.
- 2) **Adultery.** Christ does not have other wives. He does not seek the hand of others. When marriage partners seek love in the arms of someone outside of their spouse, they mar and pollute the picture of Christ's faithfulness to the church.
- 3) **Divorce.** Christ does not forsake His people, nor do His true people ultimately deny Him. Christ is not a divorcee. When marriages split up, it ruins the picture of the permanence of Christ's relationship to His people.
- 4) **Homosexuality.** Christ does not marry Himself, He marries His created Bride, one similar and yet different from Himself. The church does not marry itself. Other forms of sexual perversions, too numerous and too distasteful to mention are polluting the picture of Jesus and His Bride.
- 5) **Pornography.** Lusting for the bodies of people other than your spouse does not picture the Lord Jesus and His Bride. Christ loves the church. The church is to have no idols, nothing it desires above Christ. Pornography pictures the dirt of dissatisfaction, coveting what is not yours, making statements about how satisfied you are with your spouse.
- 6) **Individualism.** More and more people live for themselves, please themselves, live life their own way, and then expect marriage to work. Jesus Christ did not seek His own.

*"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." (Rom 15:2-3).*

Selfishness is not a picture of Christ and the church. People who want to still live their own lives drift apart and destroy their marriages. Many people think when they get married – 'I want us to be one, but I'm the one'. Their view of oneness is

absorbing another person into themselves, causing that person to be them, not the unity God meant.

- 7) **Materialism.** The lust for possessions, and more money causes people to do foolish things. It has wives in some cases unnecessarily working, when the husband's income is actually enough. It has people lusting for a standard of life that requires the wife to work, when they could be just as happy, and probably happier, with less. It causes people to get into unnecessary debt, while they spend money they don't have, to buy things they don't need, to impress people they don't know. This lusting after things and money is not a picture of Christ and the church. Doesn't Hebrews 13:5 say:
  - 8) *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"* The church is to be content with Christ. Christ is content with Himself and with His Bride. Lusting after things expresses profound dissatisfaction and speaks of idolatry.

These are seven things that ruin the picture of Christ and the church. And here is the lesson – if you ruin the picture, you will not enjoy the symbol. If you mess up what it stands for, it will malfunction, and you will hate it rather than love it. On the other hand, if you are committed to upholding the meaning of marriage, then you will deeply enjoy the day-to-day life of marriage. Ignore, neglect or refuse to uphold God's intended picture, and you will suffer the consequences.

Here then are 9 things that uphold the picture of Christ and the church, and thereby uphold and develop oneness and unity in the marriage. Here's the interesting thing – if you have the right view of God as laid out in Ephesians 1 to 3, if you have the right response to that God as laid out in chapters 4 and 5, then most of these things will be in place.

### **Marital Unity Sustained By:**

**Character (Eph 4:13, 22-24)** A marriage can go no further than the Christlikeness of the two people involved. They both need to be diligently working on their own spiritual lives to become the kind of people that love God and are pleasing to Him. Only as they each resemble Christ, will increasing harmony take place. In Ephesians 4 we saw the walk of Christlikeness - putting off the old, being renewed in our minds and putting on the new.

As we are increasingly shaped to be like Christ, we fit each other more and more. Someone has used the illustration of a triangle. The two bottom points of a triangle get closer together, as they both move toward the head of a triangle. You cannot build a marriage on two people who are spiritually irresponsible, spiritually slothful, and spiritually undisciplined. It requires choosing to do right, being single-mindedly devoted to God, and applying sustained discipline to your spiritual life for there to be change. When two such people are doing that, the result will be increasing oneness.

The parallel with the church and Christ is: we are as close to Christ as we are Christlike. The more like Him we become, the more we know Him and love Him. Similarly, we will be as close to each other as we are Christlike.

**Common Understanding of Marriage (Eph 5:32)** – If you aim at nothing you'll hit it every time. The way to oneness includes being united on why you are married, what it is all about. Now certainly marriage is about companionship, love, assistance, bearing and raising children. But those are not primary reasons. The primary reason is worship. Marriage is a means to know and love God. Through marriage, God teaches us some of our best lessons about selfishness, service and sacrifice. He teaches us about His love for us, and our love for Him. Marriage is not essential for worship; otherwise God would cause everyone to be married. But it is a tool He chooses for some people's lives. Marriage is part of knowing, loving and serving God through loving and being loved by another.

Unbelievers cannot enter into the fullest blessings of marriage because it is a symbol that can only be fully understood and enjoyed when you are a believer.

The parallel with Christ and the church is that Christ wants us to have a common understanding of His purposes, and our responses to His purposes. We grow in oneness with Christ, when we are of one mind with Him.

#### **Committed to Spirit-filled Roles (Eph 5:18-25)**

Both people must obey God's plan for marriage. A husband who refuses to lead lovingly and a wife who refuses to follow lovingly will not grow in oneness. If man's wisdom rules your marriage, you will not enjoy the fruit of God's pattern. We must embrace the roles and flesh them out.

We grow in oneness with Christ when we understand His purposes, and our responsibilities. When we understand what is He doing, and what we must do. We grow in Christ by continually getting in our place. We acknowledge Him as Lord, and follow Him as His children, as His sheep. When we assume His role of Leader of our lives – what happens? When we refuse to submit to His wishes – what happens? It fractures the unity; it stalls the growth in oneness.

#### **Communication (Eph 4:25, 29, 5:4)**

A number of weeks ago we dealt with Godly Speech. We saw that God forbids filthy communication – speech that corrupts the hearer. We saw ungodly speech is deceitful, destructive and defiling. If communication is not Christlike, misunderstandings and sin enter the picture. In contrast to that, we need to have speech that is truthful, loving and pure. Apart from that, marriage will be plagued by conflict, disagreements and annoyances.

Christ's communication was always true, loving and pure. When He speaks to the church, He speaks perfectly so that there are no misunderstandings. Misunderstanding God is sin on our part, not poor communication on His.

**Conflict Resolution** (Eph 4:1-3) – when two sinners get together, at some point, there will be disagreement. It is not always because of sin, but it often is. When there is a conflict, we can either work through it biblically, to end up closer, more secure, or we can cause damage, distrust and disunity. Conflict is inevitable. Damage to the relationship does not have to be. The key is to seek to make disagreements grounds for knowing each other more, not less.

Sinful conflict is where we blow up, or clam up, or make threats, or manipulate. The key in conflicts is to not allow sinful anger in, and to keep godly communication going. Focus on solving the problem, not on beating the other person. Don't sacrifice the relationship for a situation.

Ed Young speaks about conflict going from a wounded heart, to a cold heart, to a hard heart, to an apathetic heart. That ought not to happen if we apply the lessons of Ephesians. Ephesians 4:1-3 tells us what kind of heart to have to keep the unity. Eph 4:29 tells us what kind of speech to use in a disagreement. Eph 4:31 tells us what emotions to avoid in a conflict, while Eph 4:32 tells us how to be toward one another. The bottom line key to resolving conflict is humility. If you insist of 'my way' you will never biblically resolve conflict. You might avoid it, try to forget about it, try to keep busy, pretend it never happened, wait for the other person, and give them the silent treatment for a few minutes or hours or days. But it won't be biblical. When we resolve conflict biblically, it causes us to trust each other more, know each other more, be more patient with each other, and be more forgiving.

When we displease the Lord, what does He do? He immediately sets His Holy Spirit to convict us, so that there may be restoration and fellowship. The Lord does not avoid us or wait for us to initiate reconciliation. Indeed, He causes our failures to become the very things that grow us closer to Him.

### **Cutting the Apron Strings**

Ad Ed Young Puts it. Be willing to leave your parental authority. Leaving doesn't just mean physically. They can be dead, and you can not have left them, leaving means being making the relationship with your spouse your priority relationship. Have an adult relationship with your parents; do not be slavishly dependent on them. For that matter, it means eliminating bad attitudes toward your parents, which will tie you to them no matter where you go. Though the parallels are certainly not exact, when a believer returns to, or keeps depending on his old authority – self and sin, he causes problems in his relationship with Christ. In Jesus Christ we are under new authority, and are not to vacillate between the old authority and the new.

### **Cash Management (4:29)**

A major cause of a lack of unity is money. As we mentioned earlier, poor spending habits, unnecessary debt, overreaching yourself too soon, being impatient to have everything right at the beginning of a marriage – causes a lack of unity.

Being committed to biblical financial guidelines causes unity and oneness. A husband and wife must know God's view on money. Know His view on work, on giving, on planning and saving and budgeting, on debt, on materialism. Be agreed on what pleases God financially. Follow His principles, and accept His sovereignty.

In our relationship with Christ – He said '*Ye cannot serve God and mammon*'. God wants our view of money to be right, squared away, so that we can focus on loving and serving Him.

### **Children (6:1-4)**

Children are either a magnetic force that draw two people together, or a wedge that drives them apart. Couples must agree on how many children they want, when they want to have children, and then how to raise the children. If God blesses a marriage with children, they are to raise their children in a likeminded fashion. They must make the Bible the final authority for how to raise children, how to instruct them, how to supervise them, how to correct them, how to nourish, guide, and train them. They must follow God's example of how He raises and trains up His children as a model.

### **Communion physically**

The marriage bed is honourable and the bed is to be undefiled. The physical relationship is not to be taken before marriage, it is not to be taken outside of marriage - in adultery or pornography, and it is also not to be withheld from one another in marriage. The physical relationship is never to be used as a weapon.

*"Defraud [Deprive] ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your [lack of self-control].  
(1Co 7:5)*

Christ will not withhold Himself from us, nor should we do that to Him.

The nine "C's" of oneness in marriage – Character, Common understanding of marriage, Committing to Spirit-filled roles, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Cutting the Apron Strings, Cash Management, Children, Communion Physically.

When you are not walking in harmony with your spouse, it is not only your relationship with each other that suffers. It's your relationship with Christ. You cannot be violating His clear demonstration of who He is, and be found pleasing to Him

*"Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1Pe 3:7)*

Someone has said the best thing you can do for your children is to have a happy marriage. One of best things you can do for the church is to have a happy marriage. This blessedness is not out of our reach, because it is what we have as individual Christians

with Christ. The key is - are we willing to be one flesh? Are we willing to not absorb someone else's personality, but unite with theirs to be one? If you'll submit to that, you will enjoy oneness with another, and model oneness with Christ, and experience oneness with Christ.