Ephesians 5:31-32

The Glorious Mystery of Marriage

Sermon final

This morning we're starting our series the "**Spirit Filled Household"** - I want for you to see where I get the title which is *very intentional*. Back in **5:18** Paul gave a command to us – "**Be filled with the Spirit**" and then he gave 5 results of what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. The last result is found in **5:21** where we left off. So the command, **"be filled with the Spirit (5:18)"** has as its result **"submitting to one another (5:21)".** Then, **"submitting to one another" in 5:21** is further illustrated in **5:22-6:9** in what is known as a household code. Household codes were very common in ancient literature as a kind of blueprint, or set of rules for the household that was intended to bring peace, joy, and stability to the home and to the society at large.

Spirit filled submission then is illustrated further in 3 different sets of relationships within the home – **Household code: husbands and wives (vv.22-33); children and parents (6:1-4); servants and masters within the household (6:5-9).** Hence the title of the series – "The Spirit Filled Household". As we'll see, Paul isn't only concerned with those who are called to submission (wives, children, servants), but he will also give instruction to the husbands, fathers, and masters of the home as well and at the center is Jesus Christ who is the inspiration and motive for each role within the home.

God is giving us His blueprint for the home, and we are to submit to His wisdom and authority over the home, and in doing so we can trust that a Spirit filled Household will lead to great blessing and joy within the home.

A few pastoral words before we begin: First, I am preaching these sermons first to myself. Lorrie and I have been married for going on 20 years and we are still working on our marriage. I also am not aiming comments at any of you…please know I am simply seeking to preach the text for all of us. **Second**, don't check out during the sermon if a topic doesn't apply directly to you (not all of you are married or have children). You have no idea how God might equip you to minister to others. You also will find that much of what Paul says applies to all of us. **Last**, I know that many of you have unique challenges. Some of you need some minor renovations to the home. Some of you need to tear things down to the foundation. God's word never returns void and you will find help and restoration as you begin to obey His Word. Please resist the temptation to think, "This is great advice, but my issues are unique and therefore this doesn't apply to my marriage." If you are a husband, a wife, a child, a parent, a servant, or a master – it applies to you, and Paul doesn't give "escape clauses" in this passage even though he was well aware of the unique challenges facing the Ephesians.

This morning we're going to start with the foundation of the house. The foundation of the household code is found in the middle of the passage: The husband and wife relationship (vv.22-33) is the primary relationship of every household, and at the foundation of this relationship is Christ and the church (vv.31-32)…so we're going to start here and set a foundation for everything else.

Whenever Lorrie and I do premarital counseling, the first question I always ask the new couple is, "What is the ultimate purpose of marriage?". Rarely do we get the answer that Scripture clearly gives. In other words, when God created marriage, what was His ultimate reason? ***If I were to ask you that this morning, how would you answer?*** In order for something to function in a healthy way you have to first understand the purpose! There was a hospital in Dallas (Parkland Memorial Hospital) that was built in 1954 and they had massive issues there because the way it was built, it didn't function well as a hospital and so many peoples lives for years were put at risk – they rebuilt it in 2015. Lives are at stake when the household isn't built correctly. When you build a structure, you consider the layout first and the functionality of the structure. Building a house will have a very different layout than a hospital. ***Some people's homes are dysfunctional because they didn't first consider "what is God's purpose for this home?" Praise God that He is here to restore, reorder, and revive.***

I want to look at two foundational purposes that God intended when He created marriage. The first foundational purpose is HUGE, but the second purpose is the ULTIMATE purpose for marriage and its lies underneath and above the first foundational purpose.

1. Marriage is about oneness (v.31)

Paul digs down DEEP here, all the way back to the very foundation of marriage in Genesis 2:24. Look at v.31:

> **Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. (Ephesians 5:31; Genesis 2:24)**

This passage is THE passage on marriage that Jesus used when questioned about marriage. This is marriage in its primal state, before sin, before the fall, before marital strife. Marriage is about one man and one woman becoming one flesh. This purpose of "one flesh" informs Paul's teaching on the roles in the home. Look at **v.28** – "**husbands should love their wives *as their own bodies***", and then, "**he who loves his wife *loves himself*** [because they are ONE].". Then in v.29 – "**no one ever hated his *own flesh***"…why is the wife his **"own flesh"**? Because they are "**one flesh".** So everything Paul says about healthy *roles and function* in marriage is built on the *foundational purpose of marriage* that **"the two shall become one flesh".**

What does this "one flesh" look like? First, let's consider what "one flesh" does NOT mean. One flesh does not mean that there is no longer a distinction between husband and wife. Each person still has their own personality and personhood. Each person has their own walk with Jesus. Next week we're going to look briefly at how mankind (singular) is made up of two distinct genders – male and female. And in this way is created in the image of God - the Trinity (Gen. 1:27). That's crucial for understanding gender and marriage and roles in marriage…come learn with us next week. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Spirit – but they are all equally ONE God. The husband is not the wife, and the wife is not the husband…but they are "one flesh". So if you're married you are still your own person. But you are not alone and not to think of yourself as "only you". Therein lies one of the foundational problems…people still think of themselves as "only themselves". But how you live, operate, and function, just like the members of the Trinity, becomes a glorious dance between you and your spouse. Something has changed! What has changed?

Oneness is confessed publicly and consummated physically. This speaks to the "when" of oneness. You became one ***when you confessed***, you "spoke words" to your spouse…vows in the presence of witnesses…you were openly proclaiming your spouse to now be one flesh with you. We're going to see that Jesus speaks words to His bride as a cleansing, washing, sanctifying act (**5:26-27**). Then after the ceremony your oneness was ***consummated physically***. This is how Paul views sexual union in **1 Cor. 6:16** where he is speaking of the evil sin of prostitution…again quotes Gen. 2:24:

> **Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." (1 Cor. 6:16)**

Oneness is physical and consummated physically through sexual union. When physical intimacy breaks down in marriage – oneness breaks down. So oneness is *confessed through vows*, and *consummated through sexual union*. But oneness is MORE than physical. We know that because the husband is commanded to care for his "**own flesh**" which is his wife, in this passage (as well as others) in ways that go beyond physical needs. Christ cares for his own body, the church, in physical, emotional, and spiritual ways – so too "**in the same way"** the husband is to "**nourish and cherish" (v.28**) his wife in physical, emotional, and spiritual ways – BECAUSE she they are "**one flesh**". Clinton Arnold says that marriage is "***a close intimate relationship that encompasses every aspect of their being – emotional, physical, and spiritual***"

Oneness in marriage can best be defined in two words – "leaving and cleaving". You've all probably heard, "leave and cleave". Those words come right out of Gen. 2:24. First **"leave"** Look again at v.31 – **"therefore a man shall LEAVE his father and mother…"** One unified couple (man and woman) has raised up a young man and a young woman who are now ready to leave and start a new family. It is in this way that God fulfills His command to "**be fruitful and**

multiply" (**Gen. 1:28**). Leaving means that every other EARTHLY relationship is second now to your spouse. The only relationship that you serve above your spouse is God Himself. The second word is "**cleave**". Look again at v.31 – **"therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and HOLD FAST to his wife**". The word in Greek for **"hold fast"** expresses an intense joint relationship. It's a word used to "bond, unite, or glue together two objects". The two become one in a very real way. Personality and personhood in marriage is not removed, rather they are enhanced, comingled with, enlarged with the union of the other. This union implies a sharing of life together, a sharing of resources, a sharing of pains and toils. This union of "every aspect of their being" (as Clinton Arnold said) is so real and deep that some couples, over time, actually begin to look like each other. They finish each other's sentences, they know what the other is thinking, they serve one another's best interests, they find their sexual fulfillment in the fulfillment of the other person, not just in their own. They retain their likes and dislikes, but those likes and dislikes are expanded and changed over time. **Oneness is something that is *confessed and consummated.* It is a *leaving* all other relationships and a *cleaving* to your spouse.** And **oneness in marriage is *caused by God*** - ***confessed with vows, consummated through sexual union, and caused by God***. Jesus pointed to God Himself as the cause of union in marriage:

> **'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mt. 19:5)**

Who caused the oneness? Jesus says, "God has joined them together". God is the creator of both spouses, and the creator and cause of oneness in marriage…therefore, God is the final authority over marriage not you. A few things to think about regarding this foundational purpose of marriage:

First, Any attack on marriage [both within or without] is an attack on what God has joined together. If the devil or anyone attacks your spouse or gets in between you are your spouse, they are attacking what God has joined together. If my wife comes to me and tells me that any relationship I have (whether it be with a man or a woman, one of my children or parents) is coming between my relationship with her…that relationship must come second and be reexamined. No one gets in the way of what God has joined together…and that means even the two who are married. God has joined you together…you are not free to disavow the vows you made before God without extreme consequences.

Second, **the health of your spouse (emotionally, physically, spiritually) directly affects you**. There is no way of getting around this! This is why Paul implores husbands to love their wives – "***as their own bodies***" and ***"as themselves"*** - what happens to your spouse directly affects you. That is a calling…and when you said, "I do!" you were called and are still called –

there is no getting out of this calling. In sickness, in health, until death. You are to walk through life carrying the burdens of your spouse. It's a glorious calling, one of the highest callings a person can have! ***Remember that Jesus carries your burdens…all of them…to the end. With blood-stained hands that were pierced for YOUR sin, and He implores you to carry the burdens of your spouse***.

Finally, **God is for your marriage** and that is very very good news! God has joined you together and God always provides a way to repair what has been broken! He wants your marriage to be whole far more than you do…and that is a very comforting thought because we can begin to think there is no hope! There is always hope with God…but it is going to take effort on your part and a close examination of the foundation and function of marriage. For some of you this idea is new…for some of you, you have forgotten this but need to return to your vows and the oneness of your marriage. ***When you commit to surrender and obey, God will commit to restore and heal in His way and in His timing.***

What we've said is already a HUGE purpose for marriage – oneness. But now we'll see the ultimate purpose that lies even further down in the foundations of marriage. This purpose goes back into the mind and plan of God before the foundation of the world. It's a plan that was hidden for centuries, but now has been revealed to us.

2. Oneness in marriage is a parable of oneness between Christ and the church (v.32)

The Marriage oneness between man and woman that God created from the beginning had a greater purpose – it was an illustration, a parable, that was formerly concealed, but now revealed in Christ and His church. This is the single most profound statement about marriage in all the Bible. Look at v.32 to see it:

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:32)

Paul quotes "the two shall become one flesh" – Gen. 2:24 – and then says "it refers to Christ and the Church". This statement would be odd if it were not for all that we've already learned in Ephesians. Paul has been prepping us for this revelation of marriage with "oneness language" all the way up to this point.

Notice that Paul uses a very important word that we've already seen in Ephesians to describe the oneness of marriage – he calls it a "**mystery**". Mystery, you remember, in Greek does not mean "unable to comprehend", rather it is used to speak of "**something formerly concealed but now revealed**". Jesus spoke in parables – which were puzzling stories – that were intended to reveal formerly hidden ***mysteries*** (same word) of God's Kingdom. Paul spoke of the church itself as a ***mystery*** because it was formerly unknown that in the church, the body of Christ, God would join together Jews and Gentiles (**3:3-9**). Now Paul says that marriage is a

mystery by reaching back to **Gen. 2:24** and then reaching forward in time to Christ and the church and he says the former (oneness in marriage) is a parable, picture, illustration, type, of the latter (the oneness of Christ and the church).

The implications are MASSIVE…which is why Paul says, "this is a MEGA MYSTERY"…the word for "**profound**" is actually (μεγα - MEGA).

Back to my premarital question, "What is the ultimate purpose of marriage"? Answer: Oneness in marriage is meant to be a parable of the oneness between Christ and the church. ***Let that sink in for a moment because the stakes are raised very high for you to live out the parable faithfully and with integrity. How would you respond if God came to you and said, "I want for you to image forth the oneness of Jesus and His bride, through the way you are one with your spouse."? You can see how gloriously significant marriage becomes. And you can see how careful we ought to be to get the roles of marriage that Paul describes in this passage right.***

As oneness is marriage is confessed, consummated, and caused by God, so too oneness between Christ and His church is confessed, consummated, and caused by God: Oneness between Christ and His body, the church, was ***also caused by God*** – God put forth Christ as a payment for the church's sins, and we are now forgiven and one with Jesus through the blood He shed at Calvary on our behalf. Christ died so that the church could become one with Him and one with God. Oneness between Christ and the church is ***also confessed*** by the word, the vows, of the gospel which was preached to you and through which "**you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11).** And ***you also confessed*** in return making your vows to Him, "**if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10:9**). This ***cause of God*** and ***confession of the gospel preached and believed*** was also ***consummated through the new birth*** – you became one with Jesus and with the church who is one with Jesus. ***Have you done that already? Your marriage will totally miss its ultimate purpose if you haven't first experienced the oneness between you and your Savior. The household cannot function in a healthy way unless the right purpose for marriage is first established. The Love and oneness that is required in the home must first be received - You cannot give what you have not first received!***

What does oneness between the church and Jesus now look like? Paul has already told us in Ephesians 1-4! You can now see how Paul has set the stage to talk about marriage in this way because he already showed us through phrases such as "**in Christ**" and "**with Christ**" that we are ***chosen, adopted, redeemed, given grace, given an inheritance, predestined, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and guaranteed to be holy and blameless before Him. We are raised with Him, seated with Him, and He protects us, provides for us, and guarantees to never leave or***

forsake us. **(1:3-2:9). He is seated over the church as it's Head…and He protects, provides, and initiates all that is needed for the church (1:20-2:10). He reconciles the nations – Jews and Gentiles both into one body, one new man in place of the two, one dwelling place for God (2:11-22). As the churches Head and Husband, He pours into the church and provides everything needed for unity, growth, stability, and maturity (4:7-16). In 5:18 He fills the church with His Spirit…and the Spirit filled household lives out the parable of oneness between Christ and the church as husband is one with wife and takes his cues from Jesus the head, and the wife is one with her husband and takes her cues from the church, the bride. This is A HUGE, MEGA, GLORIOUS REVELATION.**

Here is the main point in closing: Marriage is a high calling, and it demands all of you. Can I just ask you, is the oneness in your marriage a fitting parable of the oneness between Christ and the church? What does your marriage preach to your children about Jesus and the church? What does your marriage tell your friends and coworkers? What message are you preaching to the world about Jesus and His bride through your marriage?

God calls each of us to do our own 100%. You can't do your spouse's part, but God calls you to do your 100%…He died for you to be His bride, surely you can die for the sake of your spouse. Our marriages will be a parable of Christ and the church, or not. Giving up is not an option. Marriage is a very high calling. Divorce and separation are never the perfect will of God – sometimes in few cases they are permissible but never without horrific consequences! Christ's oneness with His church CANNOT BE BROKEN…so too your marital oneness cannot be broken. Divorce is a permanent breaking of the parable. Separation is a temporary breaking of the parable. Our marriage in this life is a picture of our eternal marriage to our groom Jesus. This is why God HATES divorce…to divorce or to separate is to break the picture, parable, illustration of the never breaking, ever binding marriage of Jesus and His bride, the church!

All of us need work here…and we can always do better if we realize the standard is a marriage that properly images forth the oneness between Christ and the church. Hence this series. We're going to go very slow and along the way we'll see glorious things about marriage and even more glorious things about Jesus and His love for the bride of Christ, the church.

Prayer

God, in this church there are many unique circumstances. There are marriages that are healthy. There are marriages that need work (really we all do). There are marriages that are hanging on by a thread. Your Word restores us…it confronts us, convicts us, sets us right, and heals and restores and brings great joy and blessing. Your Word is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." I pray for myself, for Lorrie, for my marriage, and

for our church – help us all to not settle for anything less than your perfect will in our marriages. God I know there are times when people in marriage come to a place where they can't even stand to be around one another and they lose hope and they can't imagine anything ever getting better. Would you give them faith and hope this morning…and would you give them a resolve to honor and glorify and obey you…if they will begin to surrender to you their obedience, you will begin to heal over time. Our marriages are meant to image forth your love and unity with the church…this is a high calling…give us the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to have Spirit Filled Households. In Jesus name…amen.